

DRAMATIC NOTES (1769) ("HAMBURGISCHE
DRAMATURGIE"):—

ON ACTING 179

VOLTAIRE AND SHAKESPEARE:—

1. Of Ghosts on the Stage . . . 190

2. French and English Tragedy . . 198

HISTORICAL ACCURACY IN THE DRAMA . . 207

ON COMEDY 208

THE DRAMATIC UNITIES 210

THE MINGLING OF COMEDY AND TRAGEDY . 213

ARISTOTLE AND TRAGEDY 220

DRAMATIC NOTES.

ON ACTING.

ALL maxims in a play must come from the fulness of the heart with which the mouth overflows; and they must savour neither of prolonged contemplation nor of boasting.

It therefore stands to reason that all the moral parts must be thoroughly learnt by heart. They must be spoken without hesitation, without the slightest stammer, in an unbroken flow of words, and with such readiness that they may not appear to be due to a laboured feat of the memory, but the direct outcome of actual circumstances.

It likewise follows that no false accentuation must lead us to suspect the actor of chattering about what he does not understand. By a firm and assured tone of voice he must convince us that he is penetrated by the full meaning of his words.

But true accentuation can, if necessary, be imparted even to a parrot. And how far is that actor who only understands a passage removed from one who at the same time is conscious of its full import! Words, the sense of which is once grasped, and which are once impressed upon the memory, may be correctly repeated,

even when the mind is occupied with quite a different matter; but in such a case their true force will be altogether lost upon the speaker. The mind must be entirely concentrated upon the words; its attention must be wholly taken up with them, and then only——

And yet even then the actor may in reality feel very much, and still appear to have no feeling. Feeling is altogether the most disputed among the talents of an actor. It may exist without being recognised, and may be thought to be recognised where it does not exist. For feeling is something internal, of which we can only judge from its external signs. Now it is possible that certain features in the build of the body may either prevent these signs altogether, or at any rate weaken them and render them dubious. An actor may have a certain cast of features, certain gestures, a certain tone of voice, which we are accustomed to associate with passions and sentiments quite different from those which he is to represent and express at the moment. If this be the case, we shall not believe him, however much he may feel; for he is at variance with himself. Another, on the contrary, may be so happily formed, may possess such decisive features, may have all his muscles so readily and quickly at his command, may have power over such delicate and varied inflections of voice; he may, in short, be endowed in so high a degree with all the gifts requisite for dramatic action that he appears to be animated with the most intense feeling when he is playing parts which he does not represent originally, but after some good model, and in which all that he says and does is mechanical imitation and nothing more.

The latter actor is without doubt, in spite of his indifference and coldness, far more serviceable on the

stage than the former. Through merely copying others for a certain length of time, he will at length accumulate a number of little rules, according to which he will himself endeavour to act; and by observing them (on the principle that those modifications of the mind, which bring about certain changes in the body, are in turn influenced by such physical changes) he will attain to some measure of feeling which has not, it is true, the duration and fire of that which arises in the soul, but which, nevertheless, is sufficiently powerful at the time of the representation to cause some of those involuntary changes in the body, the presence of which affords us almost the only certain clue to the real inner feeling. Such an actor is to represent, for example, the highest pitch of fury. I will assume that he does not even properly understand his part, and that he neither comprehends fully the reasons for this anger, nor can imagine them so vividly as to rouse his own mind to anger. Now I say that if he has but learnt to copy the commonest expressions of anger from an actor of original feeling, and to imitate him faithfully—the quickened pace, the stamping of the foot, the rough voice, now harsh and loud, now smothered, the play of the eyebrows, the quivering lip, the gnashing teeth, etc.—if, I say, he only imitates well these things, which can easily be copied if desired, then his mind will inevitably acquire a dim feeling of anger, which, reacting in turn upon his body, will there produce such changes as are not solely dependent upon his will. His face will glow, his eyes flash, his muscles dilate; in short, he will seem to be veritably in anger without actually being so, without in the least comprehending why he should be so.

From these principles of feeling in general I have

endeavoured to determine what external signs accompany those feelings with which moral reflections should be uttered, and which of these signs are under our control and may consequently be represented by any actor, whether he shares the feelings themselves or not. My conclusions are as follows:—

Every moral maxim is a general axiom, and as such demands a certain degree of mental composure and calm reflection. It must therefore be uttered with a certain coldness and tranquillity.

Now such a general axiom is at the same time the result of impressions made upon the acting personages by individual circumstances. It is no mere symbolical conclusion, but a generalised sensation, and should as such be uttered with a certain fire and enthusiasm.

Consequently with enthusiasm and tranquillity, with fire and coldness—?

Precisely; with a compound of both, in which now the one, now the other, predominates, according to the conditions of the situation.

If the situation is a tranquil one, the mind must seek to impart to itself a fresh impulse, so to speak, by means of the moral maxim; it must seem to make general observations on its welfare or its duties, in such a manner that by the aid of these very generalisations it may enjoy the former the more keenly and observe the latter the more readily and bravely.

If, on the other hand, the situation is an exciting one, the mind must, as it were, arrest itself in its flight by means of the moral maxim (by which word I understand every general observation); it must seem to lend to its passions the appearance of reason, and to its stormy ebullitions that of premeditated resolves.

The first-named situation requires a lofty and inspired tone; the second, a modified and solemn one. For in the former reason must fire the emotions, whereas in the latter the emotions must be cooled down by reason.

Most actors exactly reverse this. In exciting situations they bluster out general observations as loudly as the rest of their speeches; and in tranquil ones they recite them as calmly as their other remarks. And this is the reason why moral maxims fail to appear to advantage either in the one case or in the other, and strike us as being either unnatural or else cold and tedious. Such actors can never have reflected that embroidery must contrast with its ground, and that it is wretched taste to embroider gold on gold.

Finally they spoil everything by their gestures. They know neither when nor how to gesticulate. As a rule they make too many and too insignificant gestures. When, in an exciting scene, the mind appears suddenly to collect itself in order to cast a reflective glance upon itself or its surroundings, it is natural that it should command all such movements of the body as depend merely upon its will. Not only does the voice grow softer, but all the limbs assume a position of rest, to express that inner composure without which the eye of reason cannot well look around it. The foot is at once set down with a firm tread, the arms drop, the whole body assumes a symmetrical attitude; a pause—and then the reflection. The man stands there in solemn stillness, as though he were afraid of not catching his own words. The reflection is brought to an end,—another pause,—and then, according to whether the reflection was intended to fire his passions or to moderate them, he either suddenly bursts forth again or sets his

limbs in motion slowly and by degrees. During the reflection his face alone retains traces of agitation; mien and eye are still disturbed and flashing, for these are not controlled so speedily as the hand or foot. Here, therefore, in these expressive looks, this fiery eye, and the composure of the whole of the rest of the body, consists that mixture of fire and coldness with which I am of opinion that moral reflections should be uttered in scenes of passion.

In tranquil scenes they should be uttered with this very same mixture, the only difference being that that part of the action which in the former was fiery is here cold, and that which was there cold is here fiery. When the mind, for instance, is under the influence of gentle sensations only, and seeks, by means of general observations, to impart to these sensations a higher degree of vivacity, it will also bring into play, for this purpose, those limbs which are directly under its control; the hands will be set in full motion; only the facial expression cannot change so quickly, and in mien and eye the quietness will still be visible, whilst the rest of the body has lost every trace of it.

But of what kind are the movements of the hands, with which, in tranquil scenes, moral maxims should be spoken?

We know very little concerning the chironomy of the ancients, that is to say, of the nature of the rules prescribed by them in the use of the hands. We know this, however, that they developed their gestures to a perfection of which the methods of our orators can scarcely enable us to form an idea. Of this whole language of gesture we seem to have retained nothing

but an inarticulate cry, the mere power of gesticulating, without knowing how to impart a definite meaning to our gestures or how to combine them with one another so that they may be capable of conveying, not one idea only, but a connected sense.

I am well aware that among the ancients the pantomimist must not be confounded with the actor. The latter spoke far less with his hands than the former, who used them in the place of speech, whereas the actor employed them merely for the purpose of laying a stress upon his words, and of adding, by way of illustration, an air of truth and vividness to the appointed signs of the voice. With the pantomimist the movements of the hands were not merely natural signs employed by way of illustration; many of them also possessed a conventional meaning, and of these the actor could never avail himself.

He therefore used his hands less often than the pantomimist, but none the less effectively. He did not move his hand unless he could thereby indicate or emphasise something. He knew nothing of those indifferent movements, the continuous, uniform repetition of which tends to lend to so many actors, and especially to women, the appearance of mere marionettes. Now with the right hand, now with the left, they describe in the air the half of a scraggy figure eight, or, with both hands simultaneously, they saw the air; this is what they term action, and whoever can practise it with a certain grace savouring of the dancing-master thinks that we are simply overpowered by it.

I know indeed that even Hogarth advises actors to learn how to move their hands in beautiful undulating lines, but in all directions, and with every possible

variation of which these lines are capable as regards their freedom, length, and duration. And finally he gives them this advice, merely for the purpose of practice, in order that they may thereby acquire suppleness of movement and learn how to bend their arms in a graceful manner, but not in the belief that acting itself consists in nothing more than in always describing such beautiful lines in the same direction.

Away, therefore, with this insignificant *portebras*, especially in reflective scenes! Grace in the wrong place is affectation and grimace; and the same grace too often repeated grows cold and in the end repulsive. I seem to see a schoolboy reciting his lesson, when the actor tenders me his moral reflections with the same movement with which the hand is given in a minuet, or delivers himself of his maxims as though he were drawing them from a spindle.

Every movement made by the hand in reflective passages should be significant. It is often possible to be picturesque, if only the pantomimic is avoided. I may perhaps find another opportunity of illustrating this gradation from significant to picturesque, and from these latter to pantomimic gestures. On this occasion it would lead me too far, and I will content myself with remarking that among the most significant gestures there is one kind which above all others demands the careful attention of the actor, and with which alone he will be enabled to impart life and light to his moral passages. I refer, in short, to the individualising gestures. The moral is a general axiom drawn from the particular circumstances of the acting personages; its generality renders it to a certain extent foreign to the subject, it becomes a digression, and its bearing upon the subject

at issue is unnoticed or not comprehended by the less attentive or less acute spectators. If consequently there are means of bringing its bearing home to them by visualising the symbolical side of the moral, and if such means are to be found in certain gestures, the actor must on no account neglect to make use of them.

If Shakespeare was not as great an actor in actual practice as he was a dramatist, he at all events knew as well what lay within the province of the one art as within that of the other. Yes, perhaps he even pondered the more deeply over the art of the former, because his genius tended the less in that direction. Be this as it may, every word which he makes Hamlet utter, in his advice to the players, should be a golden rule for all actors who set any store upon critical approbation. "Speak the speech, I pray you," he says, amongst other things, to the players, "as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness."

We hear a great deal of the fire of the actor; and it is a matter of common discussion as to whether an actor can show too much of it. If those who affirm this adduce in proof thereof the fact that an actor may frequently display too much animation in the wrong place, or at least more than the circumstances of the situation require, then their opponents are free to maintain that, in such cases, the actor does not display too

much animation, but too little intelligence. It altogether depends, however, upon what we mean by the word "fire." If shrieks and contortions constitute fire, it will hardly be denied that an actor may display too much of it. But if it consists in the rapidity and vivacity with which all those parts that go to make an actor combine to give to his acting the semblance of truth, then we should not desire to see this semblance of truth pushed to the extremes of illusion, if there were any chance of the actor displaying too much fire in this sense of the term. It cannot therefore be this fire that Shakespeare would have us temper in the very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of passion. He can only mean that violence of voice and movement; and it is easy to discern the reason why, even in cases where the poet has not observed the least moderation, the actor must yet moderate himself in both points. There are few voices that do not become unpleasant if strained to their utmost; and movements that are too hasty or too violent are seldom dignified. Yet neither our eyes nor our ears should be offended; and it is only by avoiding everything in the expression of violent passion that could prove offensive to either the one or the other, that actors will acquire that smoothness which Hamlet demands of them even at a time when they are to make the deepest impression, and to scare the conscience of hardened sinners out of its sleep.

The art of the actor here stands midway between the plastic arts and poetry. As visible painting, beauty must be its highest law; but as transitory painting, it need not always lend to its postures that calm dignity which gives such an imposing air to the ancient works of art. It may, and must, often partake of the wildness of a

Tempesta, the boldness of a Bernini; and they have in this art all that which is expressive and characteristic of them, without that offensive element which they retain in the plastic arts in virtue of their permanent duration. Only it must not partake of them too long; it must prepare for them gradually by the preceding movements, and by the subsequent ones resolve them once more into the general tone of normal propriety. Nor must it give to them all the force which the poet may use in his treatment. For though the art is silent poetry, it aims at making itself understood by appealing directly to the sight; and every sense must be gratified if it is to convey unfalsified impressions to the mind.

It might easily happen that, by practising that moderation which their art demands of them even in the extremes of passion, our actors should forfeit a certain amount of applause. But what applause? The gods, it is true, are fond of all that is noisy and boisterous, and rarely fail to repay good lungs with loud clapping. The German parterre, too, still shares this taste to a certain extent; and there are actors who are cunning enough to turn this weakness to account. The drowsiest actor will rouse himself towards the end of a scene, when he is about to make his exit, and, by raising his voice, overload the action, without reflecting whether the sense of his speech calls for this increase of exertion. Not seldom it even contradicts the frame of mind in which he is supposed to depart; but what is that to him? He is satisfied with having thus reminded the occupants of the parterre to bestow their attention upon him, and to be so good as to applaud after him. They should hiss after him! But unfortunately they are partly too uncritical, partly too good-natured, and take his will to please them for the deed.

VOLTAIRE AND SHAKESPEARE.

1. *Of Ghosts on the Stage.*

M. DE VOLTAIRE'S tragedy, "Semiramis," was brought out on the French stage in 1748, received great applause, and in a measure formed an epoch in the history of that stage. After M. de Voltaire had produced his "Zaire" and "Alzire," his "Brutus" and "Cæsar," he was confirmed in his opinion that the tragic poets of his nation had in many points surpassed the ancient Greeks. "From us French," he says, "the Greeks might have learnt a more skilful exposition and the great art of combining the scenes one with another in such a way that the stage never remains empty and no personage enters or leaves without a due reason. From us," he continues, "they might have learnt how rivals speak to each other in witty antitheses, and how the poet can dazzle and astonish by a wealth of lofty and brilliant thoughts. From us they might have learnt"—ah yes, what could they not have learnt from the French! Here and there, it is true, a foreigner, who has also studied the ancients a little, might humbly beg to be allowed to differ from them. He might perhaps maintain that all these prerogatives of the French have but little influence upon the essential element of tragedy, and that they are beauties which the simple grandeur of the ancients despised. Yet what is the use of raising any objection against M. de Voltaire? He speaks and the world believes. One thing only did he miss in the French stage: its great masterpieces were not performed with that splendour which the Greeks accorded to their small

attempts in an art as yet in its childhood. He looked with justifiable contempt upon the Paris theatre, an old ball-room decorated in the worst possible style, where the public, standing in a dirty pit, are jostled and crowded together; but what exasperated him most of all was the barbarous custom of allowing the spectators to mount on the stage, whereby the actors had barely sufficient room left for their most important movements. He was convinced that this practice alone had deprived France of much that would without a doubt have been attempted under less hampering conditions and in a more comfortable theatre and one better adapted for action. To prove this contention he wrote his "Semiramis." A queen who assembles her leading subjects, for the purpose of announcing her marriage; a ghost who rises from his grave to hinder incest and wreak vengeance upon his murderer; this grave which a fool enters to reappear as a criminal: all this was indeed something quite new for the French. It created as much noise on the stage, and called forth as much pomp and transformation as an opera alone was in the habit of doing. The poet considered that he had given the model for a special genus; and although he had adapted this model to the French stage such as he wished to see it, and not such as it actually was, yet the play was provisionally performed there as well as circumstances would permit. At the first performance the spectators still sat on the stage; and I, for one, should have enjoyed the sight of an antique ghost appearing in the midst of such a gallant company. It was not until the subsequent performances that this evil practice was abolished. The actors cleared the stage; and what was at the time an exception in favour of an extraordinary

play, resolved itself in course of time into a general custom. This, however, was only the case on the Parisian stage, for which, as we have said, "Semiramis" formed an epoch. In the provinces the old custom is still often adhered to, and the spectators would sacrifice every illusion rather than waive their privilege of treading on the trains of their Zaires and Meropes.

The appearance of a ghost was so daring a novelty in a French tragedy, and the poet who ventured to introduce it justified it by such curious reasons, that it is worth while pausing for a moment to examine them.

"They cry out and write on all sides," says M. de Voltaire, "that we no longer believe in ghosts, and that the apparition of departed spirits cannot seem otherwise than childish in the eyes of an enlightened nation. But stay," he replies to this; "did not the whole of antiquity believe in such miracles, and are we not permitted to take the ancients as our guides? What? Our religion has hallowed the belief in such extraordinary dispensations of providence, and it should be considered ridiculous to revive them?"

These exclamations, it appears to me, are rhetorical rather than well-grounded. Above all things I should prefer to leave aside the question of religion. In matters of taste and criticism, reasons drawn from religion are all very well to reduce an opponent to silence, but they will not always serve to convince him. Religion, as such, has no bearing upon the point at issue; and the testimony of religion, regarded as a form of ancient tradition, has neither more nor less value than any other testimony of antiquity. Consequently we have here to deal with antiquity alone.

The whole of antiquity, it is true, believed in ghosts, and the dramatic poets of the ancients were therefore right in making use of this belief. If one of their number shows us departed spirits upon the stage, it would be unreasonable on our part to find fault therein in virtue of our superior knowledge. Now, does it follow that the modern dramatic poet, who shares our superior knowledge, is justified in adopting the same course? Certainly not. But supposing he places his story in those more credulous times? Not even then. For the dramatic poet is not a historian; he has not to tell us what was once believed to have happened, but to reproduce the event before our very eyes; and he reproduces it, not for the sake of mere historic truth, but with quite a different and a higher purpose. Historic truth is not the end which he has in view, but only the means to that end; his object is to illude us, and to move our hearts by the illusion. If, therefore, it be true that we no longer believe in ghosts; if the absence of such a belief prevent the illusion, as it must needs do; if without this illusion we cannot possibly sympathise: then a dramatic poet, who, in spite of these facts, endeavours to resuscitate such exploded beliefs, only does himself harm; and all the art he has lavished upon them is wasted.

What, then, are we to conclude? That it should never be permissible to bring ghosts and apparitions upon the stage? That this source of terrible and pathetic emotions is exhausted for us? No; this would be too great a loss to poetry. Besides, are there not to be found in poetry examples enough in which genius defies all our philosophy and is able to terrify our imagination with things which in the cold light of reason

seem ludicrous to us? The conclusion must therefore be different, and the hypothesis, whence we started, a false one. We no longer believe in ghosts? Who says so? Or rather, what do we mean by these words? Do we mean that we have in modern times made such progress in knowledge that we are able to disprove the existence of ghosts; that certain incontrovertible truths, which contradict a belief in ghosts, are to-day so universally known, so constantly present to the mind of even the humblest individual, that everything that runs counter to those truths must of necessity appear to him ridiculous and absurd? We do not mean this. When, therefore, we say that we now no longer believe in ghosts, all we wish to convey is this: in this matter, concerning which almost as much may be argued for as against, which is not, and never can be, decided, the prevailing trend of modern thought preponderates on the side of unbelief. Some few hold this opinion from conviction, and many more pretend to hold it; and it is these who raise the outcry and set the fashion. The great majority, on the other hand, are silent and remain indifferent; their opinions incline now to the one side, now to the other; in broad daylight they delight in listening to the jokes which are recounted of ghosts; at night they quake with horror at the tales that are told of them.

Now a disbelief in ghosts in this sense of the term cannot and must not in the least restrain the dramatic poet from making use of them. The seeds of a potential belief in them are sown in all of us, and most of all in those persons for whom he chiefly writes. The one thing needful is that he should possess the art of making these seeds germinate, and a certain dexterity in summoning up with sufficient rapidity and force arguments

in favour of the existence of such ghosts. If he possesses these, then, whatever we may believe in ordinary life, in the theatre we are bound to believe as the poet wills.

Such a poet is Shakespeare; and he stands almost alone. His ghost in "Hamlet" makes our hairs stand on end, whether they cover a believing pate or a sceptical one. M. de Voltaire gained nothing by pointing to this ghost; on the contrary, it only served to make him and his ghost of Ninus ridiculous.

Shakespeare's ghost appears to us actually to come from another world. For it comes at a solemn hour, in the witching stillness of the night, accompanied by all the gloomy and mysterious accessories with which, from the time when nursery tales were recounted to us, we have ever been accustomed to associate the idea of ghosts. But Voltaire's ghost is not even fit for a bugbear to frighten children. It is only a disguised actor, who has nothing, says nothing, and does nothing to make it appear in the least probable that he is that which he pretends to be. All the circumstances, moreover, under which he appears, destroy the illusion and betray the creation of a cold poet, who would fain illude and terrify us, but does not know how to set about it. Just take this one circumstance: preceded by a clap of thunder, Voltaire's ghost steps forth from its grave in broad daylight, in the midst of the assembled parliament. Now, where has Voltaire ever heard that ghosts are so bold? Any old woman could have told him that they avoid the light of the sun and are averse to visiting large assemblies. Voltaire was no doubt also aware of this, but he was too timid, too fastidious, to make use of these vulgar conditions; he wanted to show us a ghost, but

it was to be a superior kind of ghost, and in endeavouring to make it superior he spoilt it altogether. A ghost that takes liberties which are contrary to all precedent, to all the customs attributed to respectable ghosts, does not seem to me a proper kind of ghost; and everything that does not in such a case strengthen the illusion tends to destroy it.

Had Voltaire paid some attention to mimetic action he would have found another reason for the impropriety of letting a ghost appear before a large assembly. All present must, as soon as they behold it, exhibit signs of fear and horror; and each of them must do so in a different way, if the spectacle is not to resemble the cold symmetry of a ballet. Now suppose a troop of block-heads have been trained for this purpose; even if they have been most carefully trained, consider to what an extent these manifold expressions of one and the same emotion must divide the attention of the spectator and divert it from the principal characters. If these latter are to make a due impression upon us, not only must we be able to see them, but it will be better still if we see nothing but them. In the play of Shakespeare, it is Hamlet alone who deals with the ghost; and in the scene where his mother is present she neither sees nor hears it. All our attention is consequently fixed upon him; and the more signs we discover in him of a mind o'erthrown by fear and terror, the more readily do we take the phantom that is the cause of his disorder for that which he supposes it to be. The ghost works upon our feelings through him rather than by itself. The impression which it produces upon him passes on to us, and the effect is too apparent and too vivid for us to doubt its supernatural cause. How little Voltaire understood this stroke of

art ! At his ghost many are frightened, but to a very slight degree. Semiramis exclaims once : " Heaven ! I die ! " while the rest make no more ado about it than we might make about a friend whom we believe to be far away and who suddenly walks into the room.

I must note another point of difference between the ghosts of the English and French poets. Voltaire's ghost is nothing but a poetical machine, merely introduced for the purpose of unravelling the plot; in itself it has not the slightest interest for us. Shakespeare's ghost, on the other hand, is a real acting personage, in whose fate we take an interest; it awakens our horror, but also our pity.

This difference is no doubt due to the different points of view from which the two poets regarded ghosts in general. Voltaire looks upon the apparition of a dead man as a miracle; Shakespeare as a perfectly natural occurrence. Which of the two held the more philosophical view cannot be questioned; but Shakespeare thought the more poetically. Voltaire never regarded his ghost as a being which even beyond the grave is capable of pleasant and unpleasant emotions, and which has therefore a claim upon our pity. All that he wanted to teach us was that the divine power would at times make an exception to its eternal laws in order to bring hidden crimes to light and to punish the guilty.

I will not say that the dramatic poet commits a fault in arranging his fable in such a manner as to make it serve for illustrating or confirming some great moral truth. But I may say that this arrangement of the fable is anything but needful; that there are very instructive and perfect plays which do not aim at any such single

maxim; and that it is wrong to infer from the moral sentences, which form the close of many ancient tragedies, that the entire plays were written merely for the purpose of illustrating those sentences.

If, therefore, M. de Voltaire's "Semiramis" possessed no other merit but this, on which he prides himself so much—namely, that it teaches us to reverence the divine justice that selects extraordinary means to punish extraordinary crimes, then I should consider "Semiramis" a very indifferent play at the best, especially as this moral is by no means the most edifying. For it is indisputably more becoming to assume that Providence has no need to employ these extraordinary means, and that the reward of the good and the punishment of the bad follow in the ordinary chain of events.

2. *French and English Tragedy.*

"To lovers of literary history," says M. de Voltaire, "it will not be displeasing to learn how 'Zaire' originated. Various ladies had reproached the author with not introducing sufficient love-episodes into his tragedies. He replied that, in his opinion, tragedy was hardly the most fitting place for love; still, if they absolutely insisted upon having enamoured heroes, he could supply them with some just as well as any one else. The play was completed in eighteen days, and was received with great acclamation. The Parisians term it a Christian tragedy, and it has often being played in place of 'Polyeucte.'"

To the ladies it is, therefore, that we are indebted for this play, and with them it will long continue to be a favourite. A young and ardent monarch, subjugated by love alone; a proud conqueror vanquished by beauty alone; a Sultan without polygamy; a seraglio transformed into the free and accessible abode of an absolute mistress; a forsaken maiden, whose beautiful eyes, and nothing else, have raised her to the highest pinnacle of fortune; a heart, for which tenderness and religion contend, that is divided between its god and its idol, that would fain be pious if it could do so without ceasing to love; a jealous man, who recognises his error and avenges it upon himself: if these flattering ideas do not win the applause of the fair sex, then what indeed could do so?

Love itself dictated "Zaire" to Voltaire, a critic cleverly remarked. He would have been more correct had he said gallantry. I know of but one tragedy at which love itself has laboured, and that is Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." Voltaire, it is true, makes his enamoured Zaire express her feelings with great elegance and propriety; yet what is such expression compared with that living picture of all the smallest, most secret artifices whereby love steals into our souls, of all the imperceptible advantages which it thereby enjoys, of all the devices which it adopts to conquer every other passion, until it becomes the sole tyrant of all our desires and all our aversions? Voltaire, if I may say so, understands the official language of love very well indeed; that is to say, the language and the tone which love employs when it wishes to express itself in the most cautious and measured manner, when it has nothing to say but what would meet with the approval of the sophistical prude and the cold

critic. Yet even the best official does not always know the most about the secrets of his government; or else, if Voltaire possesses the same deep insight into the essence of love which Shakespeare had, he has at all events given us no signs of it here, and the work has consequently remained far beneath the poet himself.

Much the same might be said with regard to jealousy. His jealous Orosman plays a sorry figure beside the jealous Othello of Shakespeare. And yet the character of Orosman was unquestionably founded upon that of Othello. Cibber says—

“ From English plays, Zara’s French author fir’d,
Confess’d his muse beyond herself inspir’d,
From rack’d Othello’s rage, he rais’d his style
And snatch’d the brand that lights the tragic pile.”

I should have said: a brand from out this flaming pile, and one, moreover, that smoked more than it glowed or warmed. In Orosman we hear a jealous man speak, we see him commit a rash deed of jealousy; but of jealousy itself we learn neither more nor less than we knew before. Othello, on the other hand, affords us the fullest key to this deplorable madness; from him we can learn all that refers to it, how to awaken it and how to avoid it.

But is it always Shakespeare, I hear some of my readers ask, who understood everything better than the French? That annoys us, for we cannot read him. I seize this opportunity to remind the public of what it seems to have designedly forgotten. We have a translation of Shakespeare. It is scarcely finished, and yet it seems to be already forgotten. The critics have spoken very ill of it. I have half a mind to speak very highly of it; not for the purpose of contradicting these learned

individuals, or of defending the faults which they profess to have discovered there; but because I am of opinion that so much ado should never have been made about those faults. The task was a difficult one; and any other person than Herr Wieland would in his haste have made other slips, and through ignorance or laziness have omitted more passages; and the parts which he has done well, probably no one will do better. At any rate his translation of Shakespeare is a book which cannot be sufficiently recommended among us. We shall have enough to learn from the beauties which it contains, before the faults that accompany them offend us so greatly as to render a better translation necessary.

To return to "Zaire." The author brought it out on the Parisian stage in 1733,¹ and three years later it was translated into English and performed in London at Drury Lane. The translator was Aaron Hill, who was himself a dramatist of no mean order. This greatly flattered Voltaire, and what he says of it in his dedication to the Englishman Falkener, written in his peculiar strain of proud humility, deserves to be read. Only everything must not be considered as true as he asserts. Woe to him who does not always read Voltaire's works in the sceptical spirit in which a portion of them are written!

He says, for example, to his English friend, "Your poets had a custom to which even Addison himself submitted; such is the power of habit over reason and law. This unreasonable custom consisted in concluding each act with verses differing in style from the rest of the play; and these verses had to contain a simile. Phædra, in leaving the stage, compared herself in poetical terms to a deer, Cato to a rock, Cleopatra to children crying

¹ It was first performed on the 13th of August 1732.—TR.

themselves to sleep. The translator of 'Zaire' is the first person who has dared to defy this unnatural taste. He has avoided this custom, feeling that passion should speak in the language of truth, and that the poet should always remain out of sight, so that the hero alone may appear."

There are only three untruths in this passage; that is not much for M. de Voltaire. It is true that the English since the time of Shakespeare, and perhaps even before that, had been in the habit of concluding their blank verse acts with a rhymed couplet. But that these couplets only contained comparisons, or that they must necessarily do so, is altogether incorrect; and I am at a loss to understand how M. de Voltaire can have ventured to make such a statement to an Englishman whom he must have supposed to be familiar with the tragic writers of his own country. Secondly, it is not true that Hill departed from this custom in his translation of "Zaire." It is hardly credible that Voltaire should have read the translation of his own play less attentively than a disinterested person like myself. And yet this must be so. For as surely as the play is written in blank verse, so also does each act conclude with one or two couplets. Similes, indeed, they do not contain; but, as mentioned, of all such couplets, with which Shakespeare, Johnson, Dryden, Lee, Otway, Rowe, and the rest bring their acts to a close, there are certainly not more than five that contain a comparison to every hundred that contain none. What, then, was Hill's special merit? Even had he introduced such an innovation as Voltaire attributes to him, it would, in the third place, be untrue that his example had exercised the influence ascribed to it by the latter. To this very day as many, if not more, tragedies appear in England with acts ending in rhymed

couplets than otherwise. And Hill himself, who wrote several plays even after he had translated "Zaire," has not freed himself entirely from the old custom in a single piece. What difference, after all, does it make whether we hear a rhyme at the end or not? If the lines rhyme, they may be of service to the orchestra; the players can tell when they have to prepare themselves. And an indication to this effect may be far more skilfully given in the play itself than by means of a whistle or other signal.

In Hill's day English actors were somewhat unnatural; their tragic acting was especially wild and exaggerated. When they wished to express violent passion they would rant and behave like maniacs; the rest of the time they would drawl in a stiff, stilted, and pompous tone, every syllable of which betrayed the comedian. When, therefore, he made arrangements for the performance of his translation of "Zaire," he entrusted the title-rôle to a young woman who had never before played in a tragedy. He argued as follows: this young woman has feeling, voice, figure, and decorum; she has not yet picked up the false style of the theatre; she does not need to unlearn any faults; and if she can but persuade herself to believe for a few hours that she is that person whom she is supposed to represent, then she may utter the words as they come, and all will go well. All went well, and the theatrical pedants, who maintained, in opposition to Hill, that none but a very experienced and skilful actress could do justice to such a part, were put to silence. This young actress was the wife of a comedian, Colley Cibber, and her first attempt, in her eighteenth year, was in a *chef d'œuvre*. It is curious to note that

the French actress who took the part of Zaire at the first performance was likewise a beginner. By this means the young and charming Mademoiselle Gossin at once achieved popularity, and Voltaire himself was so fascinated by her that he lamented his age very piteously.

The part of Orosman was taken by a relation of Hill, who was not a professional actor, but a man of position. He played for the love of the art, and had no hesitation whatever in appearing in public and displaying a talent that is as estimable as any other. In England such examples of persons of standing playing for amusement are by no means rare. "The only strange thing about this," says M. de Voltaire, "is that it should appear strange to us. We must bear in mind that in this world everything depends upon custom and opinion. The French court in days gone by danced on the stage with opera singers, and nothing more is thought about it except that this form of amusement has gone out of fashion. What is the difference between the two arts but that the one is as far above the other as talents demanding great mental power are above mere bodily agility?"

.

It is strange how greatly the German taste differs from the Italian. The Italian finds Voltaire too short; we Germans find him too long. No sooner has Orosman uttered his last words and given himself the death-thrust than down goes our curtain. But is it true that the German taste really demands this? We curtail many plays in this way; but why do we do so? Do we seriously want our tragedies to end like epigrams, always with the point of the dagger or the last sigh of the hero? Whence do we calm, serious Germans get this restless

impatience, that will not suffer us to listen to another word when once the execution is over, however brief, however necessary to the artistic conclusion of the play the remaining portion may be? But I search in vain for the cause of a thing that does not exist. We are sufficiently cool-blooded to listen to the poet until the end, if only the actor would let us. We would gladly hear the last commands of the magnanimous Sultan, and share Nerestan's admiration and pity; but this we are prevented from doing. And why? In answer to this "why" I know of no "because." Are the Orosmans to blame? One can quite understand why they should like to have the last word,—stabbed and applauded. Well, we must pardon small vanities in artists.

In no country has "Zaire" encountered severer criticism than in Holland. Frederick Duim, possibly a relation of the celebrated actor of that name on the Amsterdam stage, found so much to object to in it that he considered it an easy matter to write a better play. And he actually did write—another,¹ in which Zaire's conversion plays the chief part, and which ends by the Sultan conquering his love and sending the Christian Zaire back to her fatherland with all the pomp befitting her contemplated dignity, while old Lusignan dies of joy. Who wants to hear any more of it? The one unpardonable fault which a tragic poet can commit is that of leaving us cold and unmoved; provided that he interests us, he may do as he likes with the little mechanical rules. It is all very well for the Duims to criticise, but they must not attempt to bend the bow of Ulysses themselves. I say this because I should not like to see conclusions drawn from Duim's unsuccessful improvement as to the indefensibility of his

¹ *Zaire, bekeerde Turkinne. Treurspel, Amsterdam, 1745.*

criticisms. His objections are to a large extent well founded; especially true are his remarks as to the impropriety of Voltaire's choice of scene and the unskilful way in which he makes his characters enter and leave the stage without sufficient reason. Nor has he failed to notice the absurdity of the sixth scene in the third act. "Orosman," he says, "comes to fetch Zaire to the mosque; Zaire refuses to go, without giving the slightest reason for so doing, she departs, and Orosman is left standing like a fool. Does this accord with his dignity? Is it compatible with his character? Why does he not insist upon Zaire explaining herself? Why does he not follow her into the seraglio? Was he not allowed to follow her thither?" But, my good Duim, if Zaire had explained herself, whence could the remaining acts have come? Would not the whole tragedy in that case have come to grief? Quite so. The second scene of the third act is equally absurd. Orosman again comes to Zaire; the latter again departs without giving the least reason; and Orosman, good soul, finds consolation in a monologue. But, as I have said, the uncertainty or complication had to continue until the fifth act; and if the whole catastrophe hangs upon a hair, there are many things of greater importance in this world that hang upon nothing stronger.

In other respects the last-mentioned scene is the one in which the actor who plays the part of Orosman can display his highest art in all the modest splendour which none but the greatest connoisseurs can properly appreciate. He must change from one emotion to another, and must be able to effect this silent transition so naturally that he carries the spectator with him, not by a leap, but by a rapid, yet perceptible gradation.

HISTORICAL ACCURACY IN THE DRAMA.

It is permissible for every one to have his own taste, and it is a praiseworthy thing to try to account satisfactorily for the taste which one holds. But to give to the reasons whereby one seeks to justify it a character of universality, and thus make it out to be the only true taste, if those reasons are correct, is to exceed the limits of the investigating amateur, and to set oneself up as an independent lawgiver. . . . The true art critic deduces no rules from his individual taste, but has formed his taste according to the rules demanded by the nature of his subject.

Now Aristotle decided long ago how far the tragic poet is concerned with historical accuracy: only in so far as it resembles a well-constructed fable, with which he can combine his intentions. He makes use of an event, not merely because it happened, but because it happened in such a manner that he could scarcely invent a better one for his present purpose. If an actual event should offer him this advantage, then that actual event will be welcome; but it is not worth his while to search minutely for such a case through the annals of history. And how many persons, after all, know what really has occurred? If we are but prepared to admit the possibility that something may happen from the fact that it has happened, what is there to prevent our regarding a purely fictitious fable as a true historical occurrence, of which we had never heard before? What is the first thing that invests a story with an air of reality? Is it not its inherent probability? And is it not a matter of indifference whether this probability remains unconfirmed by any

testimony or tradition or is only confirmed by such as have never come within our knowledge? A common, but groundless, impression prevails, that it is one of the objects of the stage to preserve the memory of great men; this duty belongs to history and not to the stage. The latter should teach us, not what this or that individual has done, but how every person of a certain character would act under certain given circumstances. The aim of tragedy is far more philosophical than that of history, and if the former is employed as a mere panegyric of famous men, or misused for the purpose of feeding national pride, it is indeed degraded from its true dignity.

ON COMEDY.

. . . AN absent-minded person is said to be no fit subject for comedy.¹ And why not? Absent-mindedness, it is urged, is a malady, a misfortune, but not a vice; and an absent-minded person no more deserves ridicule than one who is afflicted with the headache. Comedy, we are told, must only deal with such faults as can be remedied; but a man who is absent-minded by nature can no more be cured by means of ridicule than one who limps.

But is it true that absent-mindedness is a mental defect against which even our utmost exertions are powerless? Is it to be looked upon as a natural shortcoming rather than as a bad habit? I cannot think so. Are we not masters of our attention? Have we not the power of applying or diverting it at will? And what else is absent-mindedness but a false use of our attention? The absent-minded person thinks, only he does not think

¹ Lessing is referring to Regnard's "Distrain."

that which he should think in accordance with his present sensual impressions. His mind is not slumbering, or torpid, or inactive; it is only absent, otherwise occupied. But just as it can be occupied elsewhere, so too can it be here; it is the mind's natural function to be alive to the sensuous changes of the body. An effort is required in order to disaccustom the mind from this its proper function; surely, then, it must be possible to accustom it again thereto?

Yet even if we grant that absent-mindedness is incurable, what authority have we for supposing that comedy should only laugh at moral defects, at faults which may be cured? Every absurdity, every contrast of reality and deficiency, is laughable. But laughter and derision are far apart. We can laugh at a man, occasionally laugh about him, without in the least deriding him. Indisputable and well known as this distinction is, yet all the quibbles in which Rousseau but recently indulged with regard to the use of comedy were entirely due to the fact that he had failed to grasp its true import. "Molière," he tells us, for example, "makes us laugh at the misanthrope, and yet the latter is the honest man of the play; here, therefore, Molière proves himself an enemy to virtue in that he makes the virtuous man appear contemptible." Not so; the misanthrope does not become contemptible; he remains what he was, and the laughter arising from the situations in which the poet places him does not in the least lower him in our esteem. The same applies in the case of the absent-minded man; we laugh at him, but do we on that account despise him? We recognise his other good qualities as we ought; nay more, were it not for them we should not feel inclined to laugh at his absent-mindedness. Let a bad, worthless

person be endowed with this absent-mindedness, and then see if it still remains laughable. Repulsive, disgusting, ugly, it will be, but not laughable.

Comedy is to do us good through laughter, but not through derision; not just to correct those faults at which it laughs, nor simply and solely those persons who possess these laughable faults. The true general use of comedy consists in laughter itself, in the practice of our powers to discern the ridiculous, to discern it readily and with ease, decked though it be in the cloak of passion or of fashion, in every admixture of good and bad qualities, even in the wrinkles of solemn earnestness. Granted that Molière's Miser never cured a miser, or Regnard's Gambler a gambler; admitted that laughter could never cure these fools; the worse for them, but not for comedy. Comedy, if it cannot cure desperate diseases, is satisfied with fortifying the healthy in their health. The Miser is instructive also to the generous man; and he who never plays may yet be edified by the Gambler. The vices from which they are themselves free may be shared by others with whom they have to live. It is a good thing to know those with whom one is brought in contact, and to preserve oneself from the effects of example. A preservative is also a valuable medicine, and all morality has none more powerful and efficacious than the ridiculous.

THE DRAMATIC UNITIES.

It is one thing to circumvent the rules, another to adhere strictly to them. The former is done by the French; the latter appears to have been understood by the ancients alone.

Unity of action was the first dramatic law of the ancients; the unities of time and place were merely consequences of the former, and would hardly have been observed more strictly than was necessary in order to preserve the unity of action, had it not been for the combination with the chorus. For since their actions required the presence of a large number of persons, and since these latter always remained the same throughout the play and could not be represented as going further from their abodes, or continuing absent from them for a longer time than it is customary to do from mere curiosity: the ancients could scarcely do otherwise than limit the place to one and the same spot, and the time to one and the same day. To this limitation, therefore, they adhered *bonâ fide*; at the same time, they were sufficiently masters of their art to take a broad view of that limitation, with the result that in seven cases out of nine they gained far more than they lost thereby. For, finding themselves thus restricted, they were induced to simplify the action itself and to rid it carefully of all that was superfluous, and thus, reduced to its constituent essentials, it became only the ideal of an action, which was most successfully developed in that form in which it demanded the least addition from circumstances of time and place.

The French, on the other hand, did not appreciate true unity of action; their taste had already been spoilt by the wild intrigues of the Spanish school before they became acquainted with the simplicity of the Greeks; and they regarded the unities of time and place not as consequences of the unity of action, but as circumstances which were in themselves absolutely necessary to the representation of an action, and to which they had to

adapt their richer and more complicated actions with all the rigour demanded in the use of a chorus, which, however, they had altogether abolished. But as they found how difficult, nay, at times, how impossible this was, they effected a compromise with those tyrannical rules, from which they had not the courage to withdraw their entire adherence. Instead of a definite locality they introduced an indefinite one, which could be taken to include now this, now that spot; enough if these various spots were not too far apart and none of them required special scenery, so that the same scenery, more or less, could be used for the one as for the other. Instead of the unity of a day, they substituted the unity of duration; and any space of time, during which no mention was made of sunrise and sunset and no one went to bed, or, if at all, more than once, however much might occur in that space, was counted by them as one day.

Now no one would have objected to this; for even under these conditions excellent plays may unquestionably be written, and the proverb says: "Cut the wood where it is thinnest." But I must also allow my neighbour to do likewise. I must not always show him the thickest and toughest part and cry: "There you must cut! That is where I always cut!" Yet thus do the French critics one and all exclaim, especially when they are dealing with the dramatic works of the English. What an ado they make about regularity, which regularity they have rendered so easy for themselves! But I am tired of dwelling on these points.

THE MINGLING OF COMEDY AND TRAGEDY.

ALTHOUGH Lope de Vega is regarded as the founder of the Spanish drama, yet it was not he who introduced its hybrid tone. The public was already so accustomed to it that he had to adopt it against his will. In his didactic poem on the art of inventing new comedies he complains bitterly of the fact. Finding that it was impossible to work to the satisfaction of his contemporaries by following the rules and models of the ancients, he endeavoured at least to set limits to the prevailing irregularities of his time, and this was the object of his poem. He thought that, however crude and barbaric the national taste might be, it must nevertheless be founded upon proper principles; and that it was better to act according to these, even with constant uniformity, than to have none at all. Plays which do not observe the classical rules may yet observe other rules, and must, in fact, do so if they are to please. He therefore tried to lay down certain rules, deduced from the national taste; and the first of these was the combination of the serious and the ludicrous.

He says: "You may even let kings appear in your comedies. I hear, indeed, that our wise monarch (Philip II.) disapproved of this; either because he recognised that it was against the rules, or because he deemed it derogatory to the dignity of a king to be mixed up with the mob. I am quite prepared to admit that such a step tends back in the direction of the oldest form of comedy, in which even gods were introduced, as, for example, in the 'Amphitryon' of Plautus; and I know that Plutarch, in speaking of Menander, has not much to

say in favour of the old comedy. It is therefore somewhat difficult for me to defend our fashion. But since we Spaniards are gradually leaving art out of sight, the learned must remain silent on this point. It is true that the comic mingled with the tragic, a blending of Seneca and Terence, will produce as great a monstrosity as Pasiphae's Minotaur. Yet it so happens that this medley is pleasing: people refuse to see any other plays than such as are half serious and half comic; nature herself teaches us this variety, to which she owes a share of her beauty."

It is on account of these last words that I have cited the passage. Is it true that nature herself sets us an example by combining the common and the sublime, the droll and the serious, the merry and the sad? It would seem so. But in that case Lope has done more than he imagined; not only has he palliated the faults of his stage, but he has actually proved that this particular fault is no fault at all; for anything that is an imitation of nature cannot be a fault.

"Shakespeare," says one of our latest writers,¹ "of all poets since the time of Homer, the one who has known men best and has looked them through and through with an almost inconceivable intuition, from the king to the beggar, and from Julius Cæsar to Jack Falstaff; Shakespeare has been censured for having furnished his plays with either no plot at all or else a very faulty, irregular, and badly devised one, and for having combined the comic and the tragic in the most extraordinary fashion, so that it often happens that the same person, whose touching language has brought tears to our eyes, will shortly afterwards, by some strange conceit or quaint expression of his

¹ Wieland, in his *Agathon*.—TR.

feelings, chill us, and perhaps even make us laugh, thus rendering it very difficult for him afterwards to restore us to that mood in which he would have us. People blame Shakespeare for this, and do not consider that in this very particular his plays are natural representations of human life.

“The lives of most persons and, if we may say so, the life-courses of the bodies-politic themselves, in so far as we may regard these as moral beings, resemble in so many respects the blood-and-thunder tragedies¹ of old Gothic taste, that we might almost imagine the inventors of these latter to have been wiser than one usually thinks, and to have aimed at imitating nature as faithfully as the Greeks strove to beautify it, perhaps even to have held the secret intention of ridiculing human life. Not to speak of the accidental resemblance which lies in the fact that in those plays, as also in actual life, the most important parts are often taken by the very worst actors,—what can be more alike than the two kinds of blood-and-thunder tragedies in their construction, in the division and disposition of the scenes, in their plot and its development? How rarely do the authors of the one or the other ask themselves why they have done this or that in such and such a manner and not otherwise! How often do they surprise us by events for which we are not in the least prepared! How frequently it happens that personages enter or leave the stage without affording the slightest clue as to the reason of their arrival or departure! How much in both is left to chance; we often see the greatest effects proceeding from the most trifling causes. Again, it frequently happens that the most serious and weighty actions are treated in a loose and flippant manner, and

¹ “*Haupt und Staatsaktionen.*”

the most insignificant with absurd gravity. And when, in both cases, things have at last reached such a pitch of confusion and complication that we begin to despair of the possibility of their ever being set right again, how we rejoice at seeing the Gordian knot, not indeed unravelled, but severed, all of a sudden by a fresh sword-thrust or by the unexpected appearance, amid thunder and lightning, of some god descending from pasteboard clouds. This severance comes to the same thing as unravelling; the play is brought to an end in one way or another, and the spectators applaud or hiss as they will or may. Every one knows what an important personage the noble harlequin represents in the comic tragedies of which we are speaking. He appears to want to occupy a permanent place upon the stage of the German capital, presumably as a perpetual monument to the taste of our ancestors. Would to heaven that he represented no other personage upon the stage but himself! How many great acts upon the stage of this world have at all times been performed together with, or, what is worse, by means of a harlequin! How often have the greatest men, born to be the protecting genii of a throne, the benefactors of whole nations and ages, lived to see all their wisdom and valour frustrated by the petty practical joke of a harlequin, or of such who, if they do not wear his own peculiar jacket and yellow hose, yet bear his whole character! How often in both kinds of tragi-comedy the complication arises from the sole reason that the harlequin has, by some stupid and knavish piece of work, managed to thwart the designs of sensible people before they were aware of it!"

If in this comparison of the great and the small, the original and the counterfeit heroic farce, the satirical

mood were not so prominent, it might be considered the best apology for the comi-tragic or tragi-comic drama (mixed plays I have seen them styled elsewhere), and the most conscientious deduction of Lope's thoughts. But it would at the same time serve to confute them. For it would prove that the very example in actual life which should justify the combination of solemn earnestness and farcical merriment could equally well justify any dramatic monstrosity that has neither plot nor connection nor common sense. Consequently imitation of nature must either be no principle of art; or if it is, art would thereby cease to be art. At all events, it would reach no higher level than, say, the art of imitating the coloured veins of marble in plaster of Paris; be their direction and course what they may, the strangest cannot be so strange as to seem otherwise than natural; that alone appears unnatural which displays too much symmetry, equality, proportion, too much of that which in every other art constitutes art; the most artistic, in this sense, is here the worst, and the most irregular the best.

As a critic our author might speak quite differently. That which he here appears to defend so carefully he would without doubt condemn as an abortive remnant of barbaric taste, or at any rate as the first attempts of an art reviving among an uncivilised people, the form of which has been determined in a large measure by a conjunction of certain external causes or by pure accident, and in which reason and reflection have had but little or no share. He would hardly say that the first inventors of mixed plays (since the term has been coined, I may as well use it) "aimed at imitating nature as faithfully as the Greeks strove to beautify it."

These words "faithfully" and "beautify," as applied to imitation and to nature as the object of imitation, are liable to many misconceptions. There are persons who maintain that nature cannot possibly be imitated too faithfully, and that even those things which in actual life displease us, will, if faithfully imitated, please us in virtue of their imitation. There are others, again, who regard beautifying nature as an idle notion; a nature that aims at being more beautiful than nature itself, they say, is for that very reason unnatural. Both parties declare themselves to be admirers of nature as she is; the former see nothing to avoid, the latter nothing to add. To the one, therefore, the Gothic mixed plays must of necessity be pleasing; and the other would find it difficult to enjoy the masterpieces of the ancients.

But what if such were not the case? What if the former, great admirers though they be of common, every-day nature, nevertheless declare themselves against the mixture of the farcical and the interesting? What if the latter, despite their aversion to all that aims at being better and more beautiful than nature, could yet survey the entire theatre of the Greeks without experiencing the slightest displeasure on this account? How can we account for this contradiction?

We should have to return to our starting-point, and retract what we there said with regard to the two kinds of plays. But how could we do this without involving ourselves in fresh difficulties? The comparison of such blood-and-thunder tragedies, the value of which we are discussing, with human life and the course of the world in general is surely a very fair one!

I will offer a few suggestions, which, if they are not in themselves sufficiently thorough, may yet call forth more

thorough ones. The main idea is this: it is true, and yet not true, that the comic tragedy of Gothic origin aims at a faithful imitation of nature; it imitates faithfully but one half of nature, and neglects the other half altogether; it imitates the nature of appearances, without in the least regarding the nature of our feelings and faculties.

In nature everything is connected; everything is intersected, everything alters, everything changes from one into another. But in its complete and endless variety it is a spectacle for none but an infinite spirit. In order that finite beings may have a share in this enjoyment, they are endowed with the power of setting arbitrary limits to it, of eliminating, and of guiding their attention at will.

This power is exercised by us during every moment of our lives; without it we should have no such thing as life; in the extreme diversity of our feelings we should feel nothing; we should be the constant victims of present impressions; we should dream without knowing what we were dreaming.

The aim of art is to spare us this abstraction in the realm of the beautiful, to facilitate the concentration of our attention. All in nature that we abstract, or wish to abstract, in our minds from an object or a combination of various objects, be it in time or in space, art in reality abstracts for us, and by its means the said object or combination of objects is placed before us as purely and concisely as the sensations which are to be provoked thereby may permit.

If we witness any weighty and affecting event, and another event of comparative unimportance intervenes, we do our very utmost to avoid the distraction with which

the latter threatens us. We abstract our minds from it; and we must of necessity be displeased at encountering in art what we would gladly dispense with in nature.

Only if the same event in its progress assumes in turn every degree of interest; if these various degrees not merely follow one another, but are of necessity evolved from one another; if earnestness gives place to laughter, sadness to joy, or *vice versâ*, so directly and inevitably that it is impossible to form an abstraction of the one or the other by itself: then, and only then, do we not require it in art, and art knows how to turn this very impossibility to account.

But enough of this; it is evident whither I am tending.

ARISTOTLE AND TRAGEDY.

CRÉBILLON is known among the French as "the Terrible." I greatly fear that he has received this name more on account of the terror which should not exist in tragedy, than on account of that legitimate terror which the philosopher includes amongst the essentials of tragedy.

And this ought not to have been named terror at all. The word used by Aristotle means fear: fear and pity, he says, should be provoked by tragedy, not terror and pity. Terror is, it is true, a species of fear; it is a sudden, overwhelming fear. But this very suddenness, this surprise, which is included in the conception of the term, clearly shows that those who here substituted the word terror for fear did not understand to what kind of fear Aristotle was referring.

"Pity," says Aristotle, "demands a person who suffers

undeservedly, and fear requires him to be one of ourselves. The villain is neither the one nor the other, and his misfortunes consequently do not excite either pity or fear."¹

Fear, as I have said, has been called terror by modern commentators and translators; and this substitution has enabled them to bring the most extraordinary charges against the philosopher.

"It has not been found possible," says one of this crowd,² "to agree as to the explanation of terror; and indeed it contains in every respect one superfluous link which hampers its universality and limits it too much. If Aristotle, in adding the words 'one of ourselves,' was merely thinking of the similarity of mankind, in the sense that the spectator and the acting personage are both human beings, however widely they may differ from each other in character, dignity, and rank: then such an addition was unnecessary, for the fact was self-evident. If, on the contrary, he was of opinion that terror could only be excited by virtuous persons or by such as are afflicted with venial faults: then he was mistaken, for common sense and experience are opposed to him. Terror undoubtedly springs from a feeling of humanity; for every human being is subject to it, and every human being is touched by this feeling at the adverse fortunes of a fellow-creature. There may possibly be persons who deny this with regard to themselves; but such a denial would only be a disavowal of their natural sensibility, a mere boast founded upon defective principles, and therefore no argument. Now if a vicious person, upon whom our attention is centred, meets with an

¹ *Poetics*, cap. xiii.

² Schmidt, in his Introduction to *The Comic Theatre*.

unexpected misfortune, we lose sight of the reprobate and behold only the human being. The sight of human suffering in general makes us sad, and this sudden feeling of sadness which comes over us is terror."

All this is perfectly true, but it is out of place. For what does it prove against Aristotle? Nothing at all. Aristotle is not thinking of this kind of terror when he speaks of that fear which can only be evoked by one of our fellow-creatures. Such fear, with which we are seized when we are suddenly brought face to face with a misfortune that threatens another person, is a sympathetic fear, and should therefore be included in the term pity. Aristotle would not say "Pity and Fear," if by the latter he understood no more than merely a modified form of pity.

"Pity," says the author of *Letters on the Emotions*,¹ "is a compound emotion consisting of love for an object and displeasure at its misfortunes. The movements by which pity manifests itself differ from the simple symptoms of love as well as from those of displeasure; for pity is a mere manifestation. But how varied this manifestation may be! Let the one limitation of time be but changed in a commiserated misfortune, and pity will manifest itself by totally different signs. The sight of Electra, weeping over her brother's urn, fills us with compassionate grief; for she thinks that the misfortune has taken place and is lamenting the loss which she has sustained. The sufferings of Philoctetes likewise call forth our pity, but in this case it is pity of a somewhat different nature; for the afflictions which overtake this virtuous man are actually present and seize him before our very eyes. But what do we feel when *Œdipus* is

¹ Moses Mendelssohn.

seized with terror, as the fatal secret is suddenly revealed; when Monime is alarmed at seeing the jealous Mithridates turn pale; when the virtuous Desdemona becomes frightened as she hears the threatening words of her Othello, erstwhile so tender? We still feel pity. But pitiful terror, pitiful alarm, pitiful fear. The movements are various; but the essence of the emotion is in all cases identical. For since love is ever connected with a willingness to put ourselves in the place of the person whom we love, we must share every kind of misfortune with that person; and this is very expressively termed compassion or pity. Why then should not also fear, terror, wrath, jealousy, revenge—in fact, all kinds of unpleasant emotions, even envy not excepted, spring from pity? We may hereby see how unskilfully the majority of critics divide the tragic passions into terror and pity. Terror and pity! Is theatrical terror no pity, then? For whom does the spectator tremble when Merope draws the dagger upon her own son? Certainly not for himself, but for Ægisthus, whose preservation he so earnestly desires, and for the deluded queen who regards him as the murderer of her son. But if we apply the name of pity to the mere displeasure which the present misfortunes of a fellow-creature excite in us: then we must draw a distinction between pity properly so called, on the one hand, and not only terror, but all other feelings communicated to us by a fellow-creature, on the other.”

These ideas are so correct, so clear, so perspicuous, that every one, it seems to us, could and ought to hold them. Nevertheless I will not ascribe the acute observations of the new philosopher to the ancient one; I am

too well acquainted with the former's contributions to the doctrine of mixed sensations, for the true theory of which we are indebted to him alone. But what he has explained so thoroughly, Aristotle may also, on the whole, have experienced; at all events it cannot be denied that Aristotle must either have believed that tragedy could and should excite nothing but genuine pity, nothing but the displeasure experienced at the present misfortunes of a fellow-creature, which seems highly improbable; or else he included under the term pity all passions in general that can be communicated to us by another.

For it certainly was not Aristotle who made the division, so justly censured, of the tragic passions into pity and terror. He has been misread and mistranslated. He speaks of pity and fear, not of pity and terror; and the fear to which he refers is not that which an impending misfortune to another person excites in us on his behalf, but that which, from our resemblance to the victim, we feel on our own behalf; it is the fear that the disasters which we see threatening him may overtake us also; it is the fear that we may ourselves become the objects of commiseration. In a word: this fear is pity referred back to ourselves.

Aristotle always requires to be interpreted through himself. If any person were thinking of giving us a new commentary upon his "Poetics," which should excel that of Dacier, I would strongly advise him, before so doing, to read the philosopher's works from beginning to end. He will come across explanations bearing upon the art of poetry, where he least expects to find them; and he must above all things study the treatises on rhetoric and ethics. It might indeed be supposed that the school-

men, who had the writings of Aristotle at their finger ends, would long ago have discovered these explanatory passages. Yet the "Poetics" was the very work to which they paid the least attention. They moreover lacked other knowledge without which the explanations referred to could not have borne fruit; they were not acquainted with the theatre and its masterpieces.

The true explanation of this fear, which Aristotle mentions in conjunction with tragic pity, is to be found in the fifth and eighth chapters of the second book of his "Rhetoric." It would have been an easy matter to remember these chapters; yet not one of his commentators seems to have called them to mind; at any rate not one has made that use of them which they afford. For even those who perceived, without their aid, that this fear was not the same as compassionate terror, might still have learnt an important fact from them—viz., the reason why the Stagyræite here combines pity with fear, why he combines it with fear alone, and not with any other passion or passions. Of the reason of this they know nothing, and I for my part should like to hear what answer their own intelligence would suggest to them, if they were asked, for example, the following question: Why cannot and may not tragedy excite pity and admiration equally as well as pity and fear?

All, however, depends upon the conception which Aristotle framed of pity. Now he was of opinion that a misfortune which is intended as the object of our pity, must of necessity be of such a nature that we are capable of dreading its happening to ourselves also, or to one of our friends. And where there was not this fear, he argued, there could be no pity; for neither he whom misfortune had so overwhelmed that he saw nothing

further to fear, nor he who considered his happiness so complete that he could not imagine any misfortune overtaking him ; neither the desperate man nor the overconfident one is in the habit of feeling pity for others. He therefore explains the fearful and the pitiable by means of each other. We find those things fearful, he says, which would awaken our pity if they had befallen, or were about to befall, another person ; and we find those things pitiable which we should fear if they were about to happen to ourselves. It is not enough, therefore, that the sufferer, for whom we are to feel pity, may not deserve his misfortune, though he may have brought it upon himself by his own weakness : his injured innocence, or rather his error, for which he is made to pay too severe a penalty, would lose its effect upon us, would fail to excite our pity, unless we saw that there was a possibility of his calamity overtaking us also. Now this possibility arises, and it becomes the more probable, if the poet does not represent him worse than mankind in general ; if he lets him think and act exactly as we should have thought and acted in his place, or as we imagine we should have done ; if, in short, he makes him of the same flesh and blood as ourselves. It is this resemblance that gives rise to the fear that our fate may as easily become like his as we feel ourselves to be like him ; and it is this fear that serves as it were to mature our pity.

Such were Aristotle's thoughts concerning pity, and by their aid alone can we arrive at the true reason why, in his definition of tragedy, fear was the only emotion which he named in conjunction with pity. It is not that this fear is a separate passion independent of pity, which might be excited now with pity, and now without it, in the same way as pity can be excited now with and now

without fear. This was Corneille's error. Aristotle's reason was that, in his definition of pity, fear was of necessity included, because nothing could awaken our pity which did not at the same time excite our fear.

Corneille had already written all his plays before he set himself to commentate upon the "Poetics" of Aristotle.¹ For half a century he had been working for the theatre, and after such experience he might undoubtedly have furnished us with much valuable information concerning the ancient dramatic code, if, during the time of his labours, he had but studied it a little more diligently. But this he appears only to have done in so far as the mechanical rules of his art were concerned. In the more essential points he disregarded it; and when he found in the end that he had violated its laws, a thing which he was by no means disposed to admit, he sought to clear himself by the help of comments, and caused his pretended master to say things of which he had never thought.

Corneille had brought martyrs upon the stage and portrayed them as the most perfect and immaculate of human beings; he had produced the most repulsive monsters in Prusias, Phocas, and Cleopatra; and of both these species Aristotle declares that they are unsuitable for tragedy, since neither of them can awaken pity or fear. What does Corneille say in answer to this? How does he contrive to prevent both his own authority and that of Aristotle from being disparaged by this contra-

¹ He says: "Je hasarderai quelque chose sur cinquante ans de travail pour la scène," in his dissertation on the Drama. His first play, "Mélite," dates from 1625, and his last, "Suréna," from 1675. This makes exactly fifty years, so that in his commentaries upon Aristotle he was certainly able to have an eye to all his plays.

diction? "We can easily come to terms with Aristotle," he says;¹ "we need only assume that he did not mean to maintain that both fear and pity were required at the same time to effect the purification of our passions, which according to him should be the chief aim of tragedy, but that one of these means would suffice. We can find this explanation confirmed in his own writings," he continues, "if we carefully weigh the reasons given by him for the exclusion of those events which he censures in tragedies. He never says: this or that event is out of place in tragedy because it merely awakens pity, and not fear; or again, such a thing is intolerable because it simply produces fear, without calling forth pity. No; he excludes such events because, as he says, they fail to excite either pity or fear; and he thereby gives us to understand that he finds them unsuitable because the one is wanting as well as the other, and that he would not condemn them if they did but produce one of these effects."

Now this is utterly wrong. And I cannot understand why Dacier, who, as a rule, did not fail to observe the false interpretations which Corneille tried to place upon the text of Aristotle to suit his own purpose, should have overlooked this, the worst example of all. Yet, after all, how could he help overlooking it, since it never occurred to him to study the philosopher's definition of pity? Corneille's ideas on this point are, as I have said, utterly wrong. Aristotle cannot have meant anything of the kind, or else we must believe that he could have so far forgotten his own definitions as to contradict himself in the most flagrant manner. If, according to his doctrine, no misfortune that befalls another can excite our pity,

¹ "Il est aisé de nous accommoder avec Aristote," etc.

unless we are afraid that it may also overtake ourselves: then no action in tragedy, which could only excite pity, and not fear, would have appeared suitable to him; for he deemed the thing itself an impossibility. Such actions did not exist for him; on the contrary, as soon as they reached a pitch at which they were capable of awakening our pity, they must, he opined, also awaken fear for ourselves; or rather, it was only by means of this fear that they called forth our pity. Still less could he conceive of an action in a tragedy, which could awaken fear for ourselves without at the same time calling forth our pity; for he was convinced that anything which awakens in us fear for ourselves, must also call forth our pity, as soon as we see others threatened or overtaken by it; and this is precisely what happens in tragedy, where we see all the evils which we fear, happening not to ourselves, but to others.

In speaking of those actions which are unsuitable for tragedy, Aristotle, it is true, avails himself more than once of the expression that they excite *neither* pity *nor* fear. Yet if Corneille has allowed himself to be misled by this *neither nor*, so much the worse for him. These disjunctive particles do not always express what he intends them to express. For if we use them to deny two or more properties of an object, the existence of the object, notwithstanding that one or other of these properties is wanting to it, depends on whether the latter can be as easily separated in nature as we separate them in the abstract by means of symbolic expressions. If, for example, we say, in speaking of a woman, that she has neither beauty nor wit, we certainly wish to convey that we should be satisfied if she possessed either of these qualities; for wit and beauty can not only be separated in thought, but they are also separate in reality. But if

we say: "This man believes in neither heaven nor hell," do we also wish to imply that we should be satisfied if he did but believe in one of the two; if he believed in heaven, but not in hell; or in hell, but not in heaven? Surely not; for he who believes in the one must of necessity believe in the other also. Heaven and hell, punishment and reward, are correlative terms; if the one exists so must the other. Or, to borrow an example from a sister-art, if we say: "This painting is worthless; it has neither outline nor colour," do we wish it to be inferred that there could be such a thing as a good painting possessing only one of these properties? All this is very clear.

But what if Aristotle's definition of pity were false? What if we found that we could also feel pity for evils and calamities which we have in nowise to fear for ourselves?

Fear for ourselves is not necessary, it is true, to produce in us a feeling of displeasure at the physical suffering of a person whom we love. Such displeasure arises simply from our perception of the imperfection, just as our love arises from that of the perfections of the individual; and when these feelings of pleasure and displeasure are united, they give rise to that mixed feeling which we term pity.

Yet even then, I do not think that Aristotle's position is at all weakened.

For although we can feel pity for others without experiencing any fear for ourselves, it is indisputable that our pity, when accompanied by such a fear, becomes much stronger and more vivid than it could otherwise be. And what is there to prevent us from assuming that the mixed sensation which we feel on beholding the physical

suffering of a beloved object, can only by the addition of fear for ourselves attain a sufficient degree of intensity to deserve the name of an effective force (*Affekt*).

This is precisely what Aristotle assumed. He did not regard pity according to its primary emotions; he regarded it merely as an effective force (*Affekt*). Without mistaking the former, he only denied to the spark the name of flame. Compassionate emotions, unaccompanied by fear for ourselves, he terms philanthropy; and he reserves the name of pity for those stronger emotions of the same kind, which are combined with fear for ourselves. According to him, therefore, the misfortunes of a villain will excite neither our pity nor our fear; yet he does not on this account deny him all power of moving us. Even the villain is still a human being possessing, in spite of all his moral imperfections, enough perfections to make us rather hope against his ruin or destruction, and to awaken in us, if we behold it, something akin to pity, the rudiments, as it were, of pity. But this rudimentary feeling, as I have already pointed out, he does not call pity but philanthropy. "A villain," he tells us, "must never be allowed to pass from a state of adversity to one of prosperity; for nothing could be more untragical; he would then lack all that he should have, and would call forth neither philanthropy, nor pity, nor fear. Neither must it be an utter villain who is plunged from a state of prosperity into one of adversity; for such an event might, it is true, excite philanthropy, but not pity, nor yet fear." I know of nothing more feeble and absurd than the common rendering of this word "philanthropy." Its adjective is usually translated into Latin by *hominibus gratum*; into French by *ce qui peut faire quelque plaisir*; and into German by *was Vergnügen*

machen kann ("what may give pleasure"). Goulston alone, as far as I can see, appears to have caught the philosopher's meaning; he translates *φιλόανθρωπον* by *quod humanitatis sensu tangat*. For this word philanthropy is used to signify that feeling which the misfortunes even of a villain can awaken; it is not the satisfaction which we feel at his well-merited punishment, but the common feeling of human sympathy which comes over us when we see him suffer, even though we are given to understand that his suffering is amply deserved. Herr Curtius would indeed confine this feeling of pity for an unfortunate villain to one section only of the evils to which he is liable. "Those accidents to the vicious," he says, "which excite in us neither terror nor pity, must be the results of their vices; for, were they to happen to them by chance, or undeservedly, the sufferers would still retain in the hearts of the spectators the privileges of humanity, which does not withhold its pity from a villain who suffers innocently." But he does not appear to have considered this sufficiently. For even in cases where the misfortune that overtakes the villain is the direct outcome of his crime, we cannot forbear suffering with him at the sight of his punishment. "Behold the mob," says the author of *Letters on the Emotions*, "as they crowd closely around the condemned criminal! They have heard of all the outrages which the villain has committed; they have been horrified at his conduct, and have perhaps even hated him. Now he is dragged, pale and fainting, to the terrible scaffold. The crowd press forward, some stand on tiptoe, others climb on to the roofs, to see how his features change at the approach of death. His sentence is pronounced; the executioner steps forward; another moment and all will be over. How earnestly all the

spectators now wish that he might be pardoned! What? That same person, the object of their hatred, whom but a moment before they would themselves have condemned to death? What has happened to send this sudden ray of human love through their hearts? Is it not his approaching doom, the aspect of the direst physical calamity, that, as it were, reconciles us to the worst offender and secures him our affection? Without love it would be impossible to feel pity for his fate."

And it is this very love for our fellow-creatures, I say, which is never entirely absent from our hearts, which, hidden beneath other and stronger emotions, lies smouldering unceasingly, and needs but a favourable gust, so to speak, of misfortune, pain, or crime, to fan it into a flame of pity; this very love it is that Aristotle understands under the name of philanthropy. We are right in looking upon it as a kind of pity. But neither was Aristotle wrong in giving it a separate name, to distinguish it, as I have said, from the highest grade of compassionate emotions, in which the addition of a probable fear for ourselves converts those emotions into effective forces (*Affekt*).

I must here meet another objection. If Aristotle conceived of the effectiveness (*Affekt*) of pity as being necessarily combined with fear for ourselves, what necessity was there for him to make special mention of fear? The word pity already included it, and it would have been sufficient for him to say: tragedy ought to effect the purification of our passions by exciting our pity. For the addition of the word fear does not alter the sense, and only makes that which he says ambiguous and uncertain.

I answer: if Aristotle had merely wished to teach us what passions can and ought to be awakened by tragedy, he might indeed have omitted all mention of fear, and would no doubt have done so, for no philosopher was ever more sparing of his words than he. But he wanted to tell us at the same time what passions ought to be purified by means of those which tragedy awakens in us; and for this purpose he was obliged to include fear. For although, according to him, the effective power (*Affekt*) of pity cannot but be connected with fear for ourselves both within and without the theatre; although fear is a necessary ingredient of pity; yet the converse does not hold good, and pity for others is no ingredient of fear for ourselves. As soon as the tragedy is over, our pity ceases; and of all the emotions which we have experienced, none remains save the possible fear which the misfortunes we have pitied have led us to entertain for ourselves. This fear we retain; and whereas before, as an ingredient of pity, it helped to purify our pity, it now helps, as an emotion continuing independently and by itself, to purify itself. Consequently, in order to show that it can and does act thus, Aristotle found it necessary to mention it separately.

It is undeniable that Aristotle never intended to give a strict logical definition of a tragedy. For instead of confining himself merely to those properties which are essential to it, he has included several others which are purely accidental to it, and which had been rendered necessary by the customs of his time. But, leaving these aside and reducing the remaining characteristics to their simplest form, we shall arrive at a concise and exact definition, viz., that a tragedy is, in a word, a poem which excites pity. According to its genus, it is the

imitation of an action, like the epic and the comedy; but according to its species, it is the imitation of an action deserving of pity. From these two conceptions all its rules may be clearly deduced, and even its dramatic form may be determined by them.

This latter statement may be doubted. At all events I know of no critic who ever thought of attempting this. They all look upon the dramatic form of a tragedy as something traditional, which is what it is simply because it happens to be so, and which is left so because it is found to be good. Aristotle alone has discerned the reason of it; but in his definition he assumes it as understood instead of pointing it out clearly. "A tragedy," he tells us, "is the imitation of an action which, not by means of narration, but by means of pity and fear, serves to effect the purification of these and similar passions." These are his actual words. Who could help noticing here the curious antithesis, "not by means of narration, but by means of pity and fear"? Pity and fear are the means employed by tragedy to attain its end, and the narration can only refer to the manner in which these means are employed or avoided. Would not Aristotle, therefore, appear to have omitted something here? Is not the proper antithesis of the narration, namely, the dramatic form, manifestly wanting? Now, how do the translators repair this omission? Some manage carefully to circumvent it; others fill it in, but only with words. They all look upon it as nothing but a carelessly worded sentence, to which they do not consider themselves bound to adhere, provided they convey the philosopher's meaning. Dacier's translation runs as follows: "*d'une action,—qui, sans le secours de la narration, par le moyen de la compassion et de la terreur,*"

etc. Curtius says, "of an action, which not by the poet's narration, but (by the representation of the action itself) by means of terror and pity serves to purify us of the faults in the passions represented." Quite so! They both say what Aristotle wishes to convey; only they do not say it *as* he says it. Yet this "*as*" is of importance; for the sentence is not really so carelessly worded as one might imagine. Briefly stated, the matter stands as follows: Aristotle found that pity of necessity demands some present misfortune; that misfortunes which have happened long ago or may happen in the distant future either fail to awaken our compassion altogether or else awaken it to a far lesser degree than would a present misfortune; that it is consequently necessary to represent the action which is to excite our pity, not as having already occurred, that is to say, in a narrative form, but as actually occurring, that is to say, in a dramatic form. And this fact, that our pity is hardly, if at all, awakened by the narration, but is almost entirely aroused by the actual sight; this fact alone justified him in substituting the thing itself in his definition in place of the form of the thing, because the thing itself is only capable of this one form. Had he considered it possible that our pity could also be awakened by the narration, he would indeed have been guilty of an important omission in saying, "not by means of narration, but by means of pity and fear." Being convinced, however, that in representation, pity and fear can only be excited by means of the dramatic form, he was justified in making that omission for the sake of brevity. I refer my readers to the ninth chapter of the second Book of his "*Rhetoric*."

And lastly, as regards the moral purpose which Aristotle assigns to tragedy and which he thought it necessary to

include in his definition of the same, the controversies to which it has given rise, especially in modern times, are well known. Now I am confident of being able to prove that all who have declared themselves against it have failed to grasp Aristotle's meaning. They have invested him with their own particular views, without knowing for certain what his views were. They combat strange notions which originate from themselves, and in refuting the emanations of their own brains they imagine that they incontrovertibly confute the philosopher. I cannot discuss this matter in detail here. But in order not to appear to speak without proof, I will add two observations.

(1.) They make Aristotle say: "Tragedy should, by means of terror and pity, purify us from the faults of the passions represented." The passions represented? If, therefore, the hero meets with misfortune owing to his curiosity, his ambition, his love, or his wrath: then our curiosity, ambition, love or wrath, is the passion which the tragedy is to purify? Aristotle thought nothing of the kind. And so these gentlemen go on disputing; their imagination transforms wind-mills into giants; confident in their victory, they tilt at them, nor do they pay the slightest heed to Sancho, who has only common-sense to commend him, and who, seated upon his more cautious quadruped, calls after them urging them not to be over-hasty, but to first look carefully around them. *Τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων*, says Aristotle; and that does not mean "the passions represented"; they should have translated it by "these and similar ones," or "the passions awakened." The *τοιούτων* refers solely to the preceding "pity and fear"; tragedy is to excite our pity and our fear, in order to purify merely these and similar

passions, but not all passions without distinction. He, however, uses the word *τοιούτων*, and not *τούτων*; he says "these and similar," and not simply "these," in order to show that by the term pity he understands not merely pity properly so-called, but all philanthropic feelings in general, and likewise, by the term fear, not merely the displeasure with which we anticipate an impending misfortune, but also every kind of displeasure which is allied to it, the displeasure at present and past misfortunes, sorrows, and griefs. Thus the pity and the fear excited by tragedy are to purify our pity and our fear in a widened sense; they are, however, to purify these alone, and no other passions.

Useful lessons and examples, serving to purify other passions also, may, it is true, be found in tragedy; but these do not form part of its aim; it shares them in common with the epic and the comedy, inasmuch as it is a poem, an imitation of an action in general, but not in so far as it is a tragedy, an imitation of an action deserving of pity in particular. All species of poetry aim at making us better than we are; it is a lamentable thing to have to prove this first, and still more so to find even poets who doubt it. But every species of poetry cannot better everything, or at any rate it cannot better all things equally; but that direction in which each is best capable of effecting improvement, and in which no other species can do so to the same degree, that, and that alone, forms its peculiar aim.

(2.) Seeing that Aristotle's opponents were not careful to observe what passions he considered that tragedy should purify in us by means of pity and fear: it was but natural that they should misinterpret the purification

itself. At the end of his "Politics," where he speaks of the purification of the passions by means of music, Aristotle promises to give a fuller account of this purification in his "Poetics." "Since, however," says Corneille, "there is no mention of it in this work, the majority of his commentators have arrived at the conclusion that it must have reached us in an incomplete form." No mention of it? For my part, I think that even in what remains to us of his "Poetics," be it much or little, there can be found all that he deemed it necessary to say on this subject to any one not altogether unacquainted with his other philosophical writings. Corneille himself noticed one passage which he thought sufficiently clear to enable us to discover the manner in which a purification of the passions is effected by tragedy, viz., the passage in which Aristotle says: "Pity demands an innocent sufferer, and fear one of our fellow-creatures." Now this passage is a very important one; only Corneille made a wrong use of it, and he could hardly help doing so, seeing that his thoughts were running on the purification of the passions in general. "Our pity for a misfortune," he says, "with which we see a fellow-creature afflicted, awakens a fear in us lest a similar misfortune overtake ourselves; this fear awakens a desire to evade it, and this desire an endeavour to purify, to moderate, to ameliorate, and even to eradicate entirely that passion owing to which the object of our pity meets with the misfortune before our very eyes. For our common sense tells us that the cause must be removed if the effect is to be avoided." But this reasoning, whereby fear is made the mere instrument with which pity effects a purification of the passions, is false and cannot possibly be what Aristotle

wished to convey. For in that case tragedy would be capable of purifying all the passions except the very two which Aristotle expressly tells us it ought to purify. It would be capable of purifying our wrath, our curiosity, our envy, our ambition, our hatred and our love, accordingly as it is the one or the other of these passions that has brought misfortune upon the object of our pity. Only our pity and our fear would it be unable to purify. For pity and fear are the passions which we, and not the acting personages, feel in tragedy; they are the passions by means of which the acting personages move us; they are not the passions which lead to their own misfortune. I am, of course, quite aware that there might be a play in which they perform both functions. But I have never yet come across one in which the suffering person was plunged into misfortune by means of misconceived pity or misconceived fear. And yet such a play would be the only one embodying, according to Corneille's interpretation, the ideas which Aristotle applied to all tragedies; and even there those ideas would not be carried into practice in the way demanded by the latter. Such a play would form, as it were, the point at which two inclined straight lines intersect never to meet again in all eternity. Dacier could not go so far wrong in interpreting Aristotle's meaning. He was bound to pay more attention to the words of his author, and these distinctly state that our pity and our fear are to be purified by the pity and the fear awakened by tragedy. But thinking, no doubt, that the purpose of tragedy would be very insignificant if it were merely confined to these limitations, he allowed himself to be persuaded, by Corneille's explanation, to assign to it a similar purification of all the other passions. And when Corneille, for

his part, denied this and proved by examples that he held it to be a beautiful thought rather than a thing generally attainable, Dacier had to accept these same examples, and thus found himself in such straits that he was forced to make the most violent twists and turns to extricate himself and his Aristotle. I say *his* Aristotle; for the real one stands in no need of such twists and turns. To repeat it once again, the latter thought of no other passions which should be purified in tragedy by means of pity and fear, save only pity and fear themselves; and it was a matter of indifference to him whether a tragedy contributed much or little to the purification of the rest of the passions. Dacier should have confined himself to that purification of which Aristotle speaks; but in that case he would certainly have had to combine it with a broader conception. "It is not difficult to explain," he tells us, "how tragedy excites pity and fear in order to purify pity and fear. It excites these passions by displaying to us the misfortunes into which our fellow-creatures have been plunged through unpremeditated faults; and it purifies them by acquainting us with these misfortunes and by teaching us neither to fear them too much, nor to be too much affected by them, if they should happen to ourselves. It enables persons to bear the most untoward accidents bravely, and causes the most wretched to deem themselves fortunate when they compare their woes with the still greater ones represented in tragedy. For in what condition could a man be found who, on beholding an *Œdipus*, a *Philoctetes*, or an *Orestes*, would not confess that all the evils which he has to suffer are as nothing when compared to those which afflict these men?" This is quite true; and the explanation cannot have

cost Dacier much reflection. He found it almost word for word in one of the Stoics who always had an eye to apathy. Without urging that the feeling of our own woe does not leave much room for pity, and that consequently in the case of a sufferer whose pity cannot be awakened, the purification or diminution of his sorrow cannot be brought about by pity: I will allow all his remarks to hold good. I would only ask: to what do all his statements amount? Has he said anything further than that pity purifies our fear? Certainly not; and yet this is but a quarter of what Aristotle intends to convey. For when the latter asserts that tragedy excites pity and fear in order to purify pity and fear, surely any one can see that this means far more than Dacier has thought it advisable to state. According to the different combinations of these various conceptions, if it is attempted to give the entire meaning of Aristotle, it must be shown successively (1) how tragic pity can, and in reality does, purify our pity; (2) how tragic fear purifies our fear; (3) how tragic pity purifies our fear; and (4) how tragic fear purifies our pity. Now Dacier confined himself merely to the third combination, and even this one he did not treat carefully, but left it only half explained. For if an attempt is made to arrive at a correct and complete conception of the Aristotelian doctrine of the purification of the passions, it will be found that each of the four combinations above mentioned includes in it a twofold contingency, which may be briefly stated as follows. Since the purification rests upon nothing else but the transformation of passions into virtuous habits, and since, according to our philosopher, every virtue is situated midway between two extremes; it follows that tragedy, if it is to transform our pity into a virtue, must be able to

purify us from the two extremes of pity; the same applies in the case of fear. Tragic pity must not only purify the soul of him who feels too much pity, but also of him who feels too little. Tragic fear must not only purify the soul of him who fears no manner of misfortune, but also of him who is afraid of every misfortune however distant and improbable it may be. In the same way, tragic pity, in regard to fear, must steer between this too much and this too little; and conversely, tragic fear in regard to pity. Dacier, as I have said, has only shown how tragic pity may moderate excessive fear, but not how its entire absence may be remedied, nor how it may be wholesomely increased in him who has too little of it; not to mention that he has omitted to say anything of the rest. Those who came after him have not in the least repaired his omissions; but in order to settle the dispute concerning the utility of tragedy in their own minds, they have drawn matters into it which apply to poetry in general but in nowise to tragedy as such in particular; they have maintained, for instance, that tragedy is intended to feed and strengthen the feelings of humanity, to inculcate a love of virtue, a hatred of vice, and so on;¹ but, my good sir, what poem should not do the same? Then if this is the intention of every poem, it cannot form the distinctive feature of tragedy; and this cannot therefore be what we were seeking.

To what end the hard work of dramatic form? Why build a theatre, disguise men and women, burden their memories, and assemble the whole town in one place, if

¹ Curtius, in his Dissertation upon the aims of Tragedy, appended to Aristotle's Poetics.

I intend my work and its representation to produce nothing more than some of those emotions which could be as well produced by any good story that every one could read at home for himself?

The dramatic form is the only one in which pity and fear may be aroused; at all events in no other form can these passions be awakened to such a degree. And yet people prefer to awaken in it all other emotions rather than these, and to use it for every other purpose than the one for which it is pre-eminently adapted.

The public is satisfied; this is well and yet not well. One has no special longing for the food with which one is bound to put up.

It is well known how intent the Greeks and the Romans were upon their plays, especially the former upon their tragedies. What coldness and indifference our public, on the other hand, show towards the theatre! To what must we attribute this difference, if it be not to the fact that the Greeks felt themselves animated by their stage with such intense and extraordinary emotions that they could hardly await the moment to experience them again and again; whereas we, on the other hand, derive such feeble impressions from our stage that we rarely consider it worth the time and the money to procure them? Most of us go to the theatre almost invariably for the sake of satisfying our curiosity or of killing time, for the sake of fashion or of company, from a desire to see and be seen; very few of us, and those but seldom, go from any other motive.

When I say we, our public, our stage, I do not mean the Germans only. We Germans candidly admit that we as yet possess no theatre. What many of our critics, who join us in this confession and who are great admirers

of the French theatre, think when they admit it, I am unable to say. But I know what my own views on the matter are. I am of opinion that not only we Germans, but also those who boast of having possessed a theatre for a century already, nay more, who brag of having the best theatre in all Europe,—that even the French themselves have as yet no theatre.

At all events, they have no tragic one. The impressions produced by French tragedy are absolutely cold and feeble. Hear what a Frenchman himself has to say of them.

“The surpassing beauties of our theatre,” says M. de Voltaire, “were combined with a hidden fault which had escaped notice because the public could not of its own accord have any higher ideas than those imparted to it by the models of the great masters. Saint-Evremont has alone discovered this fault; he says that our plays do not make a sufficient impression, that that which should excite pity only awakens tenderness, that gentle emotion takes the place of agitation, and surprise that of terror; that our feelings, in short, do not attain a sufficient degree of intensity. It cannot be denied that Saint-Evremont has laid his finger upon the secret sore of the French theatre. It may be urged that Saint-Evremont was the author of a wretched comedy, ‘*Sir Politic Wouldbe*,’ and of another equally wretched one called ‘*The Operas*’; that his small society verses are the weakest and most trivial of their kind; and that he was nothing but a poetaster. One may not have a spark of genius, and yet possess much wit and taste. Now he had unquestionably a very refined taste; this is borne out by the fact that he divined the true reason why most of our plays are so tame and cold. We have always

lacked a certain degree of warmth; everything else we possessed."

In other words: we possessed everything excepting only that which we most needed; our tragedies were excellent, but for the fact that they were not tragedies at all. And why were they not tragedies?

"This coldness," Voltaire continues, "this monotonous tameness, arose in part from the petty spirit of gallantry which was at that time so prevalent amongst our courtiers, and which transformed a tragedy into a series of amorous dialogues after the taste of *Cyrus* and *Clelie*. The only plays that formed an exception to this rule consisted of lengthy political tirades, such as *spoilt Sertorius*, made *Otho* cold, *Surena* and *Attila* wretched. There was yet another cause that prevented the display of high pathos upon our stage and hindered the action from becoming truly tragic, and that was the narrow, poorly-constructed theatre with its paltry decorations. What room was there for action upon a stage composed of a few dozen boards, which was moreover filled with spectators? How could the eyes of the latter be captivated, dazzled and illuded, by any display of pomp and accessories? How could great tragic actions be performed there? How could the poet's imagination be allowed free play? The pieces had to consist of lengthy descriptions, so that they resembled dialogues rather than plays. Every actor was bent upon shining in a long monologue, and such plays as did not contain any were rejected. In this form all theatrical action disappeared, as did also all intense display of the passions, all powerful pictures of human misery, all harrowing traits which could pierce to the very soul; the spectator's heart, instead of being rent asunder, was scarcely touched."

The first reason is a perfectly correct one. Gallantry and politics always leave a cold impression; and no poet has ever yet succeeded in arousing pity and fear by means of them. The former make us imagine that we hear only the *fat* or the schoolmaster; the latter would have us hear nothing but the human being.

But how about the second reason? Can it be possible that the absence of a spacious theatre and of good scenery should have exercised such an influence upon the genius of the poet? Is it true that every tragic plot requires pomp and accessories? Or should not the poet rather construct his play in such a manner that it could produce its full effect even without these additions?

He certainly should do so, according to Aristotle. "Fear and pity," says the philosopher, "may be awakened by appealing to the organs of sight; but they can also proceed from the connection of the events themselves; the latter is the more excellent method and that adopted by the best poets. For the story must be so constructed that it awakens pity and fear in him who merely listens to the relation of its events; such is the story of *Œdipus*, which only requires to be heard to arouse the above-mentioned passions. To produce this effect by means of the organs of sight, less art is required; and this should be left to the person who undertakes the representation of the play."

Shakespeare's plays are said to afford a curious proof of the dispensableness of scenic decorations. What plays, it is asked, stand more in need of the whole art of the decorator than these, with their constant interruptions and changes of scene? Yet there was a time when the stages, on which they were performed, consisted of

nothing but a curtain of some coarse material, which, when drawn up, disclosed the walls, which were quite bare or covered, at most, with matting or tapestry. Here there was nothing save the imagination to assist the actors in interpreting the piece and the spectators in comprehending it; yet, in spite of this, it is maintained that Shakespeare's plays were in those days more intelligible without scenery than they afterwards were with it.¹

If, then, the poet need not trouble himself about scenery; and if the same, even in cases where it would seem necessary, can be omitted without essentially detracting from his play: why should the fact of the French poets not having given us more touching plays be ascribed to the narrow and unfavourable construction of the theatre? The fault did not lie with the theatre; it lay with themselves.

And this is confirmed by experience. For to-day the French have a finer and more spacious stage; the spectators are no longer allowed upon it; the wings are kept clear; the decorator has free hands and can paint and construct whatever the poet requires of him. Yet where are those more passionate plays that one might have

¹ Cibber's *Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ire'and*, vol. ii. pp. 78, 79:—"Some have insinuated that fine scenes proved the ruin of acting. In the reign of Charles I. there was nothing more than a curtain of very coarse stuff, upon the drawing up of which the stage appeared, either with bare walls on the sides, coarsely matted, or covered with tapestry; so that for the place originally represented, and all the successive changes in which the poets of those times freely indulged themselves, there was nothing to help the spectator's understanding, or to assist the actor's performance, but bare imagination. The spirit and judgment of the actors supplied all deficiencies and made, as some would insinuate, plays more intelligible without scenes than they afterwards were with them."

expected to find? Does M. de Voltaire flatter himself that his "Semiramis" is one of them? There we have pomp and accessories in plenty, and a ghost into the bargain; and notwithstanding all this, I know of no colder play than his "Semiramis."

Now shall I be taken to mean by all this that no Frenchman is capable of writing a really passionate tragedy; that the volatile spirit of that nation is unequal to the task? I should be ashamed of entertaining such an opinion. Germany has not so far made herself ridiculous by any Bouhours; and I, for my part, have not the least inclination for the part. I am convinced that no nation in the world has been specially endowed with any mental gift superior to that of other nations. We often hear of the shrewd Englishman, the witty Frenchman. But who made this distinction? Certainly not Nature, for she distributes all things equally amongst all. There are as many witty Englishmen as witty Frenchmen, and as many shrewd Frenchmen as shrewd Englishmen, whilst the bulk of the people is neither one nor the other.

What, then, do I mean to convey? I merely want to say that the French have not yet got that which they might very well have—viz., true tragedy. And why have they not got it yet? In order to hit upon the correct reason, it would have been necessary for Voltaire to know himself a great deal better.

I mean that they have not got it because they believe that they have had it for a long time. And they are certainly strengthened in this belief by a quality which they possess beyond all other nations, but which is not a gift of nature—namely, their vanity.

As with single individuals, so it is with nations. Gottsched (it will readily be guessed why I mention him here) was in his young days held to be a poet, because at that time people did not know the difference between a mere versifier and a poet. Philosophy and criticism in due course made the distinction clear; and if Gottsched had but tried to keep abreast with the times, if he had but developed and rectified his ideas and his taste according to the ideas and the taste of the age, the versifier might perhaps have grown into a poet. But having so often heard himself styled the greatest poet, and being persuaded by his vanity that such was really the case, he neglected to do this. He could not possibly acquire what he already believed himself to possess; and the older he grew, the more obstinately and unblushingly he asserted his imagined superiority.

The same thing, it appears to me, has happened to the French. No sooner had Corneille raised their theatre a little out of the barbarous conditions in which he found it than they already deemed it close to perfection. Racine appeared to them to add the finishing touch; and from that time forth they never asked themselves for one moment (nor, in fact, had they ever done so) whether it was possible for any tragic poet to be more pathetic, more passionate, than Corneille and Racine. They took it for granted that such a thing was impossible, and all their succeeding poets had to confine their zeal to imitating the one or the other as closely as possible. For a hundred years they have thus deceived themselves and partly also their neighbours. And now let some one tell them so, and see what they will say!

Of the two, Corneille has done the greater harm and exercised the more baneful influence upon their tragic

poets. For Racine deceived them by his example only, but Corneille by his example and doctrines together.

The latter especially, which were accepted as oracles by the whole nation (with the exception of one or two pedants, a Hedelin, a Dacier, who, however, often did not themselves know what they wanted) and followed by all subsequent poets, have failed to produce anything but the most shallow, vapid, and untragical stuff. This I would undertake to prove piece by piece.

The rules of Aristotle are well calculated to produce the highest tragic effect. What does Corneille do with them? He brings them forward falsely and inaccurately; and finding them still too severe, he endeavours to discover in one or the other *quelque modération, quelque favorable interprétation*, and weakens and mutilates, misinterprets and frustrates every rule. And why? *Pour n'être pas obligés de condamner beaucoup de poèmes que nous avons vu réussir sur nos théâtres*; "so as not to be obliged to condemn many plays which have met with success upon our stage." A fine reason!

I will rapidly touch upon the chief points. Some of them I have already noticed; but for the sake of consistency I must reiterate them.

(1.) Aristotle says: tragedy should excite pity and fear. Corneille says: yes, but not necessarily both at the same time; we are quite satisfied with either one or the other, now with pity without fear, now with fear without pity. For else, where should I, the great Corneille, be with my Rodrigue and my Chimène? These good children arouse pity, very great pity, but hardly fear. Then again, where should I be, with my Cleopatra, my Prusias, my Phocas? Who can feel any pity for these wretches? And yet they awaken fear.

So thought Corneille, and the French thought it after him.

(2.) Aristotle says: tragedy should excite pity and fear; that is to say, both by means of one and the same person. Corneille says: if this can be so arranged, very good. But it is not absolutely necessary, and one would be perfectly justified in employing several persons to produce these two feelings, as I have done in my "Rodogune." Thus did Corneille, and the French follow his example.

(3.) Aristotle says: through the pity and the fear which are awakened by tragedy, our pity and our fear, and all our allied feelings, ought to be purified. Corneille knows nothing at all of this, and imagines that Aristotle meant to say that tragedy awakens our pity in order to awaken our fear, and that the latter will serve to purify in us those passions through which the object of our pity has been plunged into misfortune. I will not discuss the value of this aim; suffice it to say that it does not belong to Aristotle, and that, as Corneille assigned to his tragedies an entirely different aim, they could not but become entirely different works from those whence Aristotle had abstracted his theory; they had needs to become tragedies which were no true tragedies. And this applies not only to his plays, but to all the French tragedies, for their authors did not set themselves to follow the lines laid down by Aristotle, but those laid down by Corneille. I have already said that Dacier held that both aims could be combined; but by this very combination the former is weakened, and the tragedy falls short of its full effect. Dacier's conception of the former was, moreover, as I have shown, a very imperfect one, and it was therefore no wonder that he imagined

that the French tragedies of his time fulfilled the former aim rather than the latter. "Our tragedy," he says, "is fairly successful in the former aim of exciting and purifying pity and fear. But it rarely succeeds in the latter one, though that is the more important, and it purifies the other passions but little, or, since it ordinarily contains nothing but love-intrigues, if it purified any one of them, it would be the passion of love alone, whence it may be inferred that it is of very small value."¹ Now the truth is exactly the contrary. There are more French tragedies that do justice to the second aim than to the first. I know of several French plays which clearly expose the hurtful consequences resulting from one passion or another, and from which many good lessons may be gathered in regard to such a passion; but I know of none that excite my pity to the extent to which tragedy ought to excite it, and to which several Greek and English plays have conclusively shown me that tragedy can excite it. Some of the French tragedies are very fine and instructive works, and, in my opinion, very praiseworthy; only they are not tragedies. Their authors cannot have been other than very clever men; some of them deserve no mean rank among the poets: only they are not tragic poets; their Corneille and Racine, their Crébillon and Voltaire, have little or nothing of that which makes Sophocles a Sophocles, Euripides a Euripides, and Shakespeare a Shakespeare. These latter are seldom at variance with the essential demands of Aristotle; the former, on the contrary, are often so. For to proceed——

(4.) Aristotle says: in tragedy a good man must not be

¹ *Poet. d'Arist.*, chap. vi., Rem. 8.

plunged into misfortune without any fault on his part; for this would be too terrible. "Precisely," says Corneille, "such an event awakens more displeasure and hatred for him who causes the misfortune, than pity for him who is afflicted by it. The former feeling, which should not be the proper effect of tragedy, would consequently, unless treated with very great skill, stifle the latter feeling, which is the one that tragedy ought to produce. The spectator would go away dissatisfied, because too much wrath would be mingled with his pity, which latter would have satisfied him, if he could but have remained free from any other feelings. But," Corneille hastens to add; for he always has a "but" to follow,—“but if this cause is removed; if the poet constructs his play in such a way that the virtuous man who suffers can excite more pity for himself than hatred for him who causes his suffering; what then? Why, then,” he goes on to say, “I am of the opinion that no one should hesitate to represent even the most virtuous of men suffering upon the stage.” I am at a loss to understand how any one can deal with the philosopher in such a slipshod manner, and profess to understand him, whilst imputing opinions to him which he has never held. “A totally unmerited misfortune, which overtakes a good man,” says Aristotle, “is not suitable for tragedy, because it is terrible.” This “because,” which leads to the cause, is changed by Corneille into “in so far as,” merely a certain condition under which it ceases to be tragic. Aristotle says: it is altogether terrible, and for that very reason untragic. But Corneille says: it is untragic in so far as it is terrible. This terrible-ness is ascribed by Aristotle to the nature of the misfortune itself; but Corneille sets it down to the dis-

pleasure which it awakens towards him who is the cause of it. He does not, or will not, see that this terribleness is something quite different from this displeasure, and that even if the latter were entirely absent, the former might nevertheless be experienced to its fullest extent: it is enough for him that in the first place several of his plays seem to be justified by this *quid pro quo*; plays, which he deems so little at variance with the rules of Aristotle, that he actually has the boldness to imagine that, if Aristotle had but been acquainted with such plays, he would have modified his doctrines accordingly and gathered from them various methods by which the misfortune of a virtuous man may yet be rendered a fitting subject for tragedy. *En voici*, he says, *deux ou trois manières, que peut-être Aristote n'a su prévoir parcequ'on n'en voyait pas d'exemples sur les théâtres de son temps*. And whose are these examples? Whose else but his own? And what are those two or three methods? We will see at once. "The first," he says, "consists in representing a very virtuous person as being persecuted by a very vicious one, and yet escaping from his peril, in such a way that the vicious person is himself ensnared by it. This is the case in 'Rodogune' and in 'Heraclius'; and it would have been quite intolerable had Antiochus and Rodogune perished in the first-mentioned play, and Heraclius, Pulcheria and Martian in the second, and Cleopatra and Phocas been left to triumph. The sufferings of the former persons awaken a feeling of pity which our hatred for their persecutors is incapable of stifling, for we keep on hoping that some happy circumstance may intervene to save them from ruin." It is absurd of Corneille to try and make out that Aristotle was unacquainted with this method. On the contrary, he

was so well acquainted with it that, if he did not condemn it altogether, he at any rate explicitly declared it to be more suitable for comedy than for tragedy. How could Corneille have forgotten this? But so it is with all who start by assuming their cause to be the cause of truth. Moreover, strictly speaking, this method does not apply to the case in point at all. For it would not have the effect of rendering the virtuous man unfortunate, but would merely lead him along the road to misfortune, and this of itself might perhaps arouse sympathetic anxiety on his behalf, but it would not be terrible.

Now for the second method. "It may also happen," says Corneille, "that a very virtuous man is persecuted and ruined at the instigation of another who is not so vicious as to wholly deserve our displeasure, and whose persecution of the virtuous man reveals more weakness than wickedness. When Felix causes the downfall of his son-in-law Polyeucte, he is prompted not so much by indignant rage against the Christians, which would render him detestable in our eyes, as by servile fear, which hinders him from saving him in the presence of Severus, by whose hatred and vengeance he is awed. Some displeasure will doubtless be awakened against Felix; his conduct will be blamed; yet this displeasure will not outweigh the pity which we entertain for Polyeucte, nor will it prevent his wonderful conversion at the end of the play from reinstating him in the good graces of the spectators." I suppose there have been bunglers in tragedy at all times and even in Athens. Why then should not Aristotle have been acquainted with a play of similar construction, from which he could draw the same conclusions as Corneille? What nonsense! In plays of this kind, timid, vacillating and undecided

characters, like Felix, are but an additional fault, for they lend them a certain coldness and repulsiveness on the one hand, without in the least detracting from their terribleness on the other. For, as already mentioned, the terrible does not consist in the displeasure or aversion which they excite, but in the misfortune itself which afflicts the innocent sufferers. The misfortune is in any case equally undeserved, be the persecutors wicked or weak, be their conduct premeditated or unpremeditated. The thought that there may be persons who, from no fault of their own, meet with misfortunes, is in itself a terrible one. And whereas the Pagans tried to banish this terrible thought as much as possible, we endeavour to retain it? We try to derive pleasure from plays that confirm it? We, whom religion and common sense should have convinced that it is as erroneous as it is blasphemous?

The same would no doubt apply to the third method, had not Corneille himself forgotten to state which this is.

(5.) Aristotle's remarks upon the unfitness of an entirely vicious person to form a tragic hero, inasmuch as his misfortunes would awaken neither pity nor fear, are likewise modified by Corneille. Pity, he tells us, a person of that sort could not excite, but he might very well arouse fear. For although none of the spectators deemed themselves capable of acquiring his vices, and consequently liable to suffer his misfortune in its entirety; yet each one of them might be the victim of some fault more or less akin to one or other of these vices, and would in that case derive a salutary corrective from a fear of its consequences, which, though proportionately less serious, would still be unfortunate. But this argument is based upon the false conception which Corneille formed of

fear and of the purification of those passions which are awakened by tragedy. It contradicts itself; for, as I have already pointed out, the excitation of pity is inseparable from the excitation of fear, and if it were possible for a villain to excite our fear, he must of necessity excite our pity also. But since, as Corneille himself admits, he cannot do the latter, he can neither do the former; and he therefore does not serve in the least to fulfil the aim of tragedy. Aristotle even considers him less fitted to do so than the entirely virtuous man; for he clearly maintains that, failing a hero who combines good and bad qualities equally, it is better to choose a good one than a bad one. The reason is very simple; a man may be very good, and yet possess more faults than one or commit more errors than one, whereby he is plunged into an immeasurable misfortune which fills us with pity and sorrow, without being in the least terrible, because it is the natural consequence of his errors. What Du Bos¹ says about the employment of vicious persons in tragedy is not what Corneille means. Du Bos would only allow them as subsidiary characters, as merely instrumental in rendering the chief characters less culpable by serving as foils to them. Corneille, on the other hand, would make them the main objects of interest, as he has shown us in "Rodogune"; and it is the latter which is at variance with the aim of tragedy, not the former. Du Bos adds the very true remark that the misfortunes of these subsidiary villains make no impression upon us. "In 'Britannicus,'" he says, "we scarcely notice the death of Narcissus." And for this very reason the poet should avoid these characters as far as possible. For if their misfortunes do not directly

¹ *Réflexions cr.*, t. i., sec. xv.

further the aim of tragedy; if they are merely employed by the poet as instruments to enable him the better to achieve that aim in other characters: it cannot be denied that a play would be all the better, if it produced the same effect without their aid. The simpler a machine, the fewer its springs and wheels and weights, the more perfect it will be.

(6.) And lastly, as regards the misconception of the first and most essential quality demanded by Aristotle in the moral character of tragic personages. Their morals must be good. "Good?" says Corneille. "Why, if *good* here means the same as *virtuous*, what becomes of the majority of ancient and modern tragedies which abound in characters, which if not absolutely bad and vicious, are yet endowed with a weakness that is hardly compatible with virtue?" He is especially alarmed for the safety of Cleopatra in his "Rodogune." So he refuses to regard the goodness demanded by Aristotle as moral goodness; it must be some other kind of goodness, compatible with moral badness as well as with moral goodness. But what Aristotle means is purely moral goodness; only virtuous persons and persons who, under certain circumstances, display moral virtue, are not one and the same thing to him. Corneille, in short, connects the word "moral" with an entirely false idea, and he has altogether failed to grasp the *proæresis*, through which alone, according to our philosopher, free actions become moral or immoral. I cannot here furnish an exhaustive proof of any assertion; in order to clearly understand it, one must be familiar with the connection and syllogistic sequence of all the ideas propounded by the Greek critic. I will therefore defer

it until another occasion; all that I have to show at present is that Corneille, having missed the proper path, has chosen a very disastrous one instead. The latter leads him to the following conclusion: that by moral goodness Aristotle understood the brilliant and lofty character of some inclination, whether praiseworthy or reprehensible, which might either be the peculiar attribute of the person introduced, or else be skilfully imparted to that person; *le caractère brillant et élevé d'une habitude vertueuse ou criminelle, selon qu'elle est propre et convenable à la personne qu'on introduit.* "Cleopatra in 'Rodogune,'" he says, "is a thoroughly bad person; there is no murder that she fears to commit, if it but serve to maintain her upon the throne, which is dearer to her than anything else in the world; so keen is her love of dominion. But all her crimes are connected with a certain greatness of soul, which is of itself so impressive that, whilst we condemn her actions, we cannot but admire the source from which they originate. I would say the same thing of the Liar. Lying is unquestionably a vicious habit; but Dorante gives vent to his lies with such presence of mind, with such vivacity, that this defect almost appeals in his favour, and the spectators are bound to admit that the ability to tell such lies is a vice whereof no fool could be capable." Corneille could, indeed, hardly have arrived at a more wretched conclusion! Carry it into execution and you will find that all the truth, the illusion and the moral benefit of tragedy vanish entirely. For virtue, which is ever modest and simple, is, by assuming that brilliant character, rendered vain and romantic, whilst vice is thereby shrouded with a certain glamour which always dazzles us, from whichever point of view we regard it. It is absurd to try to employ

the mere evil consequences of a vice as a deterrent, if its inner hideousness is kept out of sight. The consequences are accidental, and experience shows us that they are as often favourable as unfavourable. This refers to the purification of the passions, as understood by Corneille. As I imagine it, as Aristotle explained it, it has nothing whatever to do with that deceptive brilliance. The false foil which is by this means given to vice causes us to recognise perfections where none exist, and to feel pity where we should feel none. Dacier, it is true, has already contradicted this explanation, but for less cogent reasons; and the one which he, together with Père Le Bossu, adopts in its place, is not far from being quite as disadvantageous to the poetical perfection of a play. For, according to him, the statement, that the morals should be good, means no more than that they should be clearly defined, *qu'elles soient bien marquées*. This is a rule which, if correctly taken, is, in its proper place, worthy of careful attention on the part of the dramatist. From the French models it would unfortunately appear that *clearly defined* has been taken to mean the same as *strongly defined*. The expression has been overcharged, pressure added to pressure, until the persons characterised have been transformed into personified characters, and vicious or virtuous human beings into haggard skeletons of vice or virtue.